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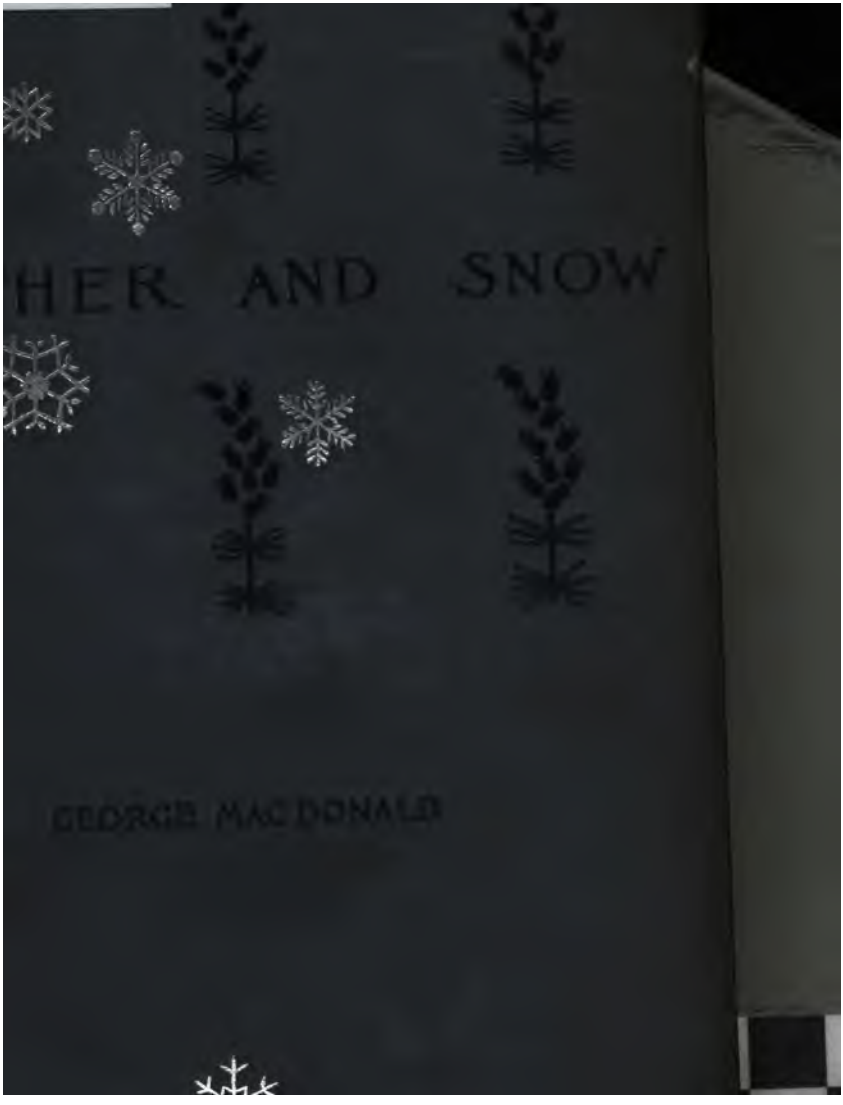
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GEORGE MAC DONALD

AUTHOR OF

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

A Runaway Race, ... 1

CHAPTER II

Mother and Son, ... 9

CHAPTER III

At the Foot of the Horn, ... 13

CHAPTER IV

Dog-Steenie, ... 25

CHAPTER V

Colonel and Sergeant, ... 33

CHAPTER VI

Man-Steenie, ... 36

CHAPTER VII

Corbyknowe, ... 43

CHAPTER VIII

David and his Daughter, ... 49

CHAPTER IX

At Castle Weelset, ... 54

CHAPTER X

David and Francis, ... 59

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CHAPTER XI

PAGE

KIRSTY AND PHEMY, ... 69

CHAPTER XII

THE EARTH-HOUSE, ... 77

CHAPTER XIII

A VISIT FROM FRANCIS GORDON, ... 91

CHAPTER XIV

STEENIE'S HOUSE, ... 97

CHAPTER XV

PHEMY CRAIG, ... 109

CHAPTER XVI

SHAM LOVE, ... 113

CHAPTER XVII

A NOVEL ABDUCTION, ... 118

CHAPTER XVIII

PHEMY'S CHAMPION, ... 132

CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS GORDON'S CHAMPION, ... 141

CHAPTER XX

MUTUAL MINISTRATION, ... 149

CHAPTER XXI

PHEMY YIELDS PLACE, ... 157

CHAPTER XXII

THE HORN, ... 165

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STORM AGAIN, ... 179

CHAPTER XXIV

PAGE

How Kirsty Fared, ... 184

CHAPTER XXV

Kirsty's Dream, ... 186

CHAPTER XXVI

How David Fared, ... 191

CHAPTER XXVII

How Marion Fared, ... 194

CHAPTER XXVIII

Husband and Wife, ... 197

CHAPTER XXIX

David, Marion, Kirsty, and what was Left of Steenie, ... 202

CHAPTER XXX

From Snow to Fire, ... 207

CHAPTER XXXI

Kirsty Shows Resentment, ... 213

CHAPTER XXXII

In the Workshop, ... 217

CHAPTER XXXIII

A Race with Death, ... 219

CHAPTER XXXIV

Back from the Grave, ... 224

CHAPTER XXXV

Francis Comes to Himself, ... 229

CHAPTER XXXVI

Kirsty Bestirs Herself, ... 234

CHAPTER XXXVII

PAGE

A GREAT GULF, ... 243

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE NEIGHBORS, ... 253

CHAPTER XXXIX

KIRSTY GIVES ADVICE, ... 262

CHAPTER XL

MRS. GORDON, ... 267

CHAPTER XLI

TWO HORSEWOMEN, ... 272

CHAPTER XLII

THE LAIRD AND HIS MOTHER, ... 275

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CORONATION, ... 278

CHAPTER XLIV

KIRSTY'S TOCHER, ... 282

CHAPTER XLV

KIRSTY'S SONG, ... 284

HEATHER AND SNOW

CHAPTER I

A RUNAWAY RACE

UPON neighboring stones, earth-fast, like two islands of an archipelago, in an ocean of heather, sat a boy and a girl, the girl knitting, or, as she would have called it, *weaving* a stocking, and the boy, his eyes fixed on her face, talking with an animation that amounted almost to excitement. He had great fluency, and could have talked just as fast in good English as in the dialect in which he was now pouring out his ambitions—the broad Saxon of Aberdeen.

He was giving the girl to understand that he meant to be a soldier like his father, and quite as good a one as he. But so little did he know himself or the world, that, with small genuine impulse to action, and moved chiefly by the anticipated results of it, he saw success already his, and a grateful country at his feet. His inspiration was so purely ambition, that, even if, his mood unchanged, he were to achieve much for his country, she could hardly owe him gratitude.

"I'll no hae the warl' lichtly (*make light of*) *me!*" he said.

"Mebbe the warl' winna tribble itsel aboot ye sae muckle as e'en to lichtly ye!" returned his companion quietly.

"*Ye* do naething ither!" retorted the boy, rising and looking down on her in displeasure. "What for are ye aye girdin at me? A body canna lat his thouchts gang, but ye're doon upo them, like doos upo corn!"

"I wadna be girdin at ye, Francie, but that I care ower muckle aboot ye to lat ye think I haud the same opingon o' ye 'at ye hae o' yersel," answered the girl, who went on with her knitting as she spoke.

"Ye'll never believe a body!" he rejoined, and turned half away. "I canna think what gars me keep comin to see ye! Ye haena ae guid word to gie a body!"

"It's nane ye s' get frae me, the gait ye're gaein, Francie! Ye think a heap ower muckle o' yersel. What ye expec, may some day a' come true, but ye hae gien nobody a richt to expec it alang wi' ye, and I canna think, gien ye war fair to yersel, ye wad coont yersel ane it was to be expeckit o'!"

"I tauld ye sae, Kirsty! Ye never lay ony weicht upo what a body says!"

"That depen's upo the body. Did ye never hear Maister Craig pint oot the differ atween believin a body and believin *in* a body, Francie?"

"No—and I dinna care."

"I wudna like ye to gang awa thinkin I misdoobtit yer word, Francie! I believe onything ye tell me, as far as *I* think ye ken, but maybe no sae far as *ye* think ye ken. I believe ye, but I confess I dinna believe *in* ye—yet. What hae ye ever done to

gie a body ony richt to believe in ye? Ye're a guid rider, and a guid shot for a laddie, and ye rin middlin fest—I canna say like a deer, for I reckon I could lick ye mysel at rinnin! But, efter and a',——"

"Wha's braggin noo, Kirsty?" cried the boy, with a touch of not ill-humored triumph.

"Me," answered Kirsty; "—and I'll do what I brag o'!" she added, throwing her stocking on the patch of green sward about the stone, and starting to her feet with a laugh. "Is't to be up hill or alang?"

They were near the foot of a hill to whose top went the heather, but along whose base, between the heather and the bogland below, lay an irregular belt of moss and grass, pretty clear of stones. The boy did not seem eager to accept the challenge.

"There's nae guid in lickin a lassie!" he said with a shrug.

"There mith be guid in tryin to do't though—especially gien ye war lickit at it!" returned the girl.

"What guid *can* there be in a body bein lickit at onything?"

"The guid o' haein a body's pride ta'en doon a wee."

"I'm no sae sure o' the guid o' that! It wud only haud ye ohn tried (*from trying*) again."

"Jist there's what yer pride does to ye, Francie! Ye maun aye be first, or ye'll no try! Ye'll never do naething for fear o' no bein able to gang on believin ye cud do't better nor ony ither body! Ye dinna want to fin' oot' at ye're naebody in particlar. It's a sair pity ye wunna hae yer pride ta'en doon.

Ye wud be a hantle better wantin aboot three pairts o' 't. —Come, I'm ready for ye! Never min' 'at I'm a lassie: naebody 'ill ken!"

"Ye hae nae sheen (*shoes*)!" objected the boy.

"Ye can put aff yer ain!"

"My feet's no sae hard as yours!"

"Weel, I'll put on mine. They're here, sic as they are. Ye see I want them gangin throuw the heather wi Steenie; that's some sair upo the feet. Straucht up hill throuw the heather, and I'll put my sheen on!"

"I'm no sae guid uphill."

"See there noo, Francie! Ye tak yersel for unco courteous, and honorable, and generous, and k-nichtly, and a' that—oh, I ken a' aboot it, and it's a' verra weel sae far as it gangs; but what the better are ye for't, whan, a' the time ye're despisin a body 'cause she's but a quean, ye maun hae ilka advantage o' her, or ye winna gie her a chance o' lickin ye! —Here! I'll put on my sheen, and rin ye alang the laich grun'! My sheen's twice the waucht o' yours, and they dinna fit me!"

The boy did not dare go on refusing: he feared what Kirsty would say next. But he relished nothing at all in the challenge. It was not fit for a man to run races with a girl: there were no laurels, nothing but laughter to be won by victory over her! and in his heart he was not at all sure of beating Kirsty: she had always beaten him when they were children. Since then they had been at the parish school together, but there public opinion kept the boys and girls to their own special sports. Now Kirsty had left school, and Francis was going to the grammar-school at the county-town. They were both about

fifteen. All the sense was on the side of the girl, and she had been doing her best to make the boy practical like herself—hitherto without much success, although he was by no means a bad sort of fellow. He had not yet passed the stage—some appear never to pass it in this world—in which an admirer feels himself in the same category with his hero. Many are content with themselves because they side with those whose ways they do not endeavor to follow. Such are most who call themselves Christians. If men admired themselves only for what they did, their conceit would be greatly moderated.

Kirsty put on her heavy-tacketed (*hob-nailed*) shoes —much too large for her, having been made for her brother—stood up erect, and putting her elbows back, said,

"I'll gie ye the start o' me up to yon stane wi' the heather growin oot o' the tap o' 't."

"Na, na; I'll hae nane o' that!" answered Francis. "Fair play to a'!"

"Ye'd better tak it!"

"Aff wi' ye, or I winna rin at a'!" cried the boy,—and away they went.

Kirsty contrived that he should yet have a little the start of her—how much from generosity, and how much from determination that there should be nothing doubtful in the result, I cannot say—and for a good many yards he kept it. But if the boy, who ran well, had looked back, he might have seen that the girl was not doing her best—that she was in fact restraining her speed. Presently she quickened her pace, and was rapidly lessening the distance between them, when, becoming aware of her approach,

the boy quickened his, and for a time there was no change in their relative position. Then again she quickened her pace—with an ease which made her seem capable of going on to accelerate it indefinitely —and was rapidly overtaking him. But as she drew near, she saw he panted, not a little distressed; whereupon she assumed a greater speed still, and passed him swiftly—nor once looked round or slackened her pace until, having left him far behind, she put a shoulder of the hill between them.

The moment she passed him, the boy flung himself on the ground and lay. The girl had felt certain he would do so, and fancied she heard him flop among the heather, but could not be sure, for, although not even yet at her speed, her blood was making tunes in her head, and the wind was blowing in and out of her ears with a pleasant but deafening accompaniment. When she knew he could see her no longer, she stopped likewise and threw herself down for a few minutes, thinking whether she should leave him, or walk back at her leisure, and let him see how little she felt the run. She came to the conclusion that it would be kinder to allow him to get over his discomfiture in private. She rose, therefore, and went straight up the hill.

About half-way to the summit, she climbed a rock as if she were a goat, and looked all round her. Then she uttered a shrill, peculiar cry, and listened. No answer came. Getting down as easily as she had got up, she walked along the side of the hill, making her way nearly parallel with their late race-course, so passing considerably above the spot where her defeated rival yet lay, and descending at length a little

hollow not far from where she and Francis had been sitting.

In this hollow, which was covered with short, sweet grass, stood a very small hut, built of turf from the peat-moss below, and roofed with sods on which the heather still stuck, if indeed some of it was not still growing. So much was it, therefore, of the color of the ground about it, that it scarcely caught the eye. Its walls and its roof were so thick that, small as it looked, it was smaller inside, while outside it could not have measured more than ten feet in length, eight in width, and seven in height. Kirsty and her brother Steenie, not without help from Francis Gordon, had built it for themselves two years before. Their father knew nothing of the scheme until one day, proud of their success, Steenie would have him see their handiwork; when he was so much pleased with it that he made them a door, on which he put a lock:—

"For though this be na the kin' o' place to draw crook-fingered gentry," he said, "some gangrel body micht creep in and mak his bed intil't, and that lock 'ill be eneuch to haud him oot, I'm thinkin!"

He also cut for them a hole through the wall, and fitted it with a window that opened and shut, which was more than could be said of every window at the farm-house.

Into this nest Kirsty went, and in it remained quiet until it began to grow dark. She had hoped to find her brother waiting for her, and, although disappointed, chose to continue there until Francis Gordon should be well on his way to the castle, when she crept out, and ran to recover her stocking.

When she got home, she found Steenie engrossed in a young horse their father had just bought. She would fain have mounted him at once, for she would ride any kind of animal able to carry her; but as he had never yet been backed, her father would not permit her.

CHAPTER II

MOTHER AND SON

FRANCIS lay for some time, thinking Kirsty sure to come back to him, but half-wishing she would not. He rose at length to see whether she was on the way; but no one was in sight. At once the place was aghast with loneliness, as it must indeed have looked to any one not at peace with solitude. Having sent several ringing shouts, but in vain, after Kirsty, he turned, and, in the descending light of an autumn afternoon, set out on the rather long walk to his home, which was the wearier that he had nothing pleasant at hand to think about.

Passing the farm where Kirsty lived, about three miles brought him to an ancient, turreted house on the top of a low hill, where his mother sat expecting him, ready to tyrannize over him as usual, and none the less ready that he was going to leave her within a week.

"Where have you been all day, Frank?" she said.

"I have been a long walk," he answered.

"You've been to Corbyknowe!" she returned. "I know it by your eyes! I know by the very color of them you're going to deceive me!—Now don't tell me you haven't been there; I shall not believe you!"

"I haven't been near the place, mother," said Francis; but as he said it his face glowed with a heat

that did not come from the fire. He was not naturally an untruthful boy, and what he said was correct, for he had passed the house half a mile away; but his words gave, and were intended to give the impression that he had not been that day with any of the people of Corbyknowe. His mother objected to his visiting the farmer, but he knew instinctively she would have objected yet more to his spending half the day with Kirsty whom she never mentioned, and of whom she scarcely recognized the existence. Little as she loved her son, Mrs. Gordon would have scorned to suspect him of preferring the society of such a girl to her own. In truth, however, there were very few of his acquaintance whose company Francis would not have chosen rather than his mother's—except indeed when he was ill, when she was generally very good to him.

"Well, this once I shall believe you," she answered, "and I am glad to be able. It is a painful thought to me, Frank, that a son of mine should feel the smallest attraction to low company. I have told you twenty times that the man was nothing but a private in your father's regiment."

"He was my father's friend!" answered the boy.

"He tells you so, I do not doubt," returned his mother. "He was not likely to leave that mouldy old stone unturned!"

The mother sat, and the son stood before her, in a drawing-room whose furniture of a hundred years old must once have looked very modern and new-fangled under windows so narrow and high up, and within walls so thick: without a fire it was always cold. The carpet was very dingy, and the mirrors

were much spotted; but the poverty of the room was the respectable poverty of age: old furniture had become fashionable just in time to save it from being metamorphosed by its mistress into a show of gay meanness and costly ugliness. A good fire of mingled peat and coal burned bright in the barrel-fronted steel grate, and shone red in the brass fender. The face too of the boy looked very red in the glow, but its color came more from within than from without: he cherished the memory of his father, and did not love his mother more than a little.

"He has told me a great deal more about my father than ever you did, mother!" he answered.

"Well he may have!" she returned. "Your father was not a young man when I married him, and they had been together through I don't know how many campaigns."

"And you say he was not my father's friend!"

"Not his *friend*, Frank; his servant—what do they call them?—his orderly, I dare say! certainly not his friend."

"Any man may be another man's friend!"

"Not in the way you mean; not that his son should go and see him every other day! A dog may be a man's good friend, and so was sergeant Barclay your father's—a very good friend that way, I don't doubt!"

"You said a moment ago he was but a private, and now you call him sergeant Barclay!"

"Well, where's the difference?"

"To be made sergeant shows that he was not a common man. If he had been, he would not have been set over others!"

"Of course he was then, and is now, a very re-

spectable man. If he were not I should never have let you go and see him at all. But you must learn to behave like the gentleman you are, and that you never will while you frequent the company of your inferiors. Your manners are already almost ruined—fit for nothing but a farm-house! There you are, standing on the side of your foot again! — Old Barclay, I dare say, tells you no end of stories about your mother!"

"He always asks after you, mother, and then never mentions you more."

She knew perfectly that the boy spoke the truth.

"Don't let me hear of your being there again before you go to school!" she said definitively. "By the time you come home next year I trust your tastes will have improved. Go and make yourself tidy for dinner. A soldier's son must before everything attend to his dress."

Francis went to his room, feeling it absolutely impossible to have told his mother that he had been with Kirsty Barclay, that he had run a race with her, and that she had left him alone at the foot of the Horn. That he could not be open with his mother, no one that knew her unreasoning and stormy temper, would have wondered; but the pitiful boy, who did not like lying, actually congratulated himself that he had got through without telling a downright falsehood! It would not have bettered matters in the least had he disclosed to her the good advice Kirsty gave him: she would only have been furious at the impudence of the hussy in talking so to *her* son.

CHAPTER III

AT THE FOOT OF THE HORN

THE region was like a waste place in the troubled land of dreams—a spot so waste that the dreamer struggles to rouse himself from his dream, finding it too dreary to dream on. I have heard it likened to "the ill place, wi' the fire oot;" but it did not so impress me when first, after long desire, I saw it. There was nothing to suggest the silence of once-roaring flame, no half-molten rocks, no huge, honey-combed scoriæ, no depths within depths glooming mystery and ancient horror. It was the more desolate that it moved no active sense of dismay. What I saw was a wide stretch of damp-looking level, mostly of undetermined or of low-toned color, with here and there a black spot, or, on the margin, the brighter green of a patch of some growing crop. Flat and wide, the eye found it difficult to rest upon it and not sweep hurriedly from border to border for lack of self-asserted object on which to alight. It looked low, but indeed lay high; the bases of the hills surrounding it were far above the sea. These hills at this season, a ring of dull-brown high-heaved hummocks, appeared to make of it a huge circular basin, miles in diameter, over the rim of which peered the tops and peaks of mountains more distant. Up the side of the Horn, which was the loftiest in the ring,

ran a stone wall, in the language of the country, a dry-stane-dyke, of considerable size, climbing to the very top—an ugly thing which the eye could not avoid. There was nothing but the grouse to have rendered it worth the proprietor's while to erect such a boundary to his neighbor's property, plentiful as were the stones ready for that poorest use of stones —division.

The farms that border the hollow, running each a little way up the side of the basin, are, some of them at least, as well cultivated as any in Scotland, but Winter claims there the paramountcy, and yields to Summer so few of his rights that the place must look forbidding, if not repulsive, to such as do not live in it. To love it, I think one must have been born there. In the summer, it is true, it has the character of *bracing*, but can be such, I imagine, only to those who are pretty well braced already; the delicate of certain sorts, I think it must soon brace with the bands of death.

The region is in constant danger of famine. If the snow come but a little earlier than usual, the crops lie green under it, and no store of meal can be laid up in the cottages. Then, if the snow lie deep, the difficulty of conveying supplies of the poor fare which their hardihood counts sufficient, will cause the dwellers there no little suffering. Of course they are but few. A white cottage may be seen here and there on the southerly slopes of the basin, but hardly one in its bottom.

It was now summer, and in a month or two the landscape would look more cheerful; the heather that covered the hills would no longer be dry and

brown and in places black with fire, but a blaze of red purple, a rich mantle of bloom. Even now, early in July, the sun had a little power. I cannot say it would have been warm had there been the least motion in the air, for seldom indeed could one there from the south grant that the wind had no keen edge to it; but on this morning there was absolute stillness, and although it was not easy for Kirsty to imagine any summer air other than warm, yet the wind's absence had not a little to do with the sense of luxurious life that now filled her heart. She sat on her favorite grassy slope near the foot of the cone-shaped Horn, looking over the level miles before her, and knitting away at a ribbed stocking of dark blue whose toe she had nearly finished, glad in the thought, not of rest from her labor, but of beginning the yet more important fellow-stocking. She had no need to look close at her work to keep the loops right; but she was so careful and precise that, if she lived to be old and blind, she would knit better then than now. It was to her the perfect glory of a summer day; and I imagine her delight in the divine luxury greater than that of many a poet dwelling in softer climes.

The spot where she sat was close by the turf-hut which I have already described. At every shifting of a needle she would send a new glance all over her world, a glance to remind one somehow of the sweep of a broad ray of sunlight across earth and sea, when, on a morning of upper wind, the broken clouds take endless liberties with shadow and shine. What she saw I cannot tell; I know she saw far more than a stranger would have seen, for she knew her home.

His eyes would, I believe, have been drawn chiefly to those intense spots of live white, opaque yet brilliant, the heads of the cotton-grass here and there in thin patches on the dark ground. For nearly the whole of the level was a peat-moss. Miles and miles of peat, differing in quality and varying in depth, lay between those hills, the only fuel almost of the region. In some spots it was very wet, water lying beneath and all through its substance; in others, dark spots, the sides of holes whence it had been dug, showed where it was drier. His eyes would rest for a moment also on those black spaces on the hills where the old heather had been burned that its roots might shoot afresh, and feed the grouse with soft young sprouts, their chief support: they looked now like neglected spots where men cast stones and shards, but by and by would be covered with a tenderer green than the rest of the hill-side. He would not see the moorland birds that Kirsty saw; he would only hear their cries, with now and then perhaps the bark of a sheep-dog.

My reader will probably conclude the prospect altogether uninteresting, even ugly; but certainly Christina Barclay did not think it such. The girl was more than well satisfied with the world-shell in which she found herself; she was at the moment basking, both bodily and spiritually, in a full sense of the world's bliss. Her soul was bathed in its own content, calling none of its feelings to account. The sun, the air, the wide expanse; the hill-tops' nearness to the heavens which yet they could not invade; the little breaths which every now and then awoke to assert their existence by immediately ceasing; doubt-

less also the knowledge that her stocking was nearly done, that her father and mother were but a mile or so away, that she knew where Steenie was, and that a cry would bring him to her feet;—all these things bore each a part in making Kirsty quiet with satisfaction. That there was, all the time, a depeer cause of her peace Kirsty knew well—the same that is the root of life itself; and if it was not at this moment or at that filled with conscious gratitude, her heart was yet like a bird ever on the point of springing up to soar, and often soaring high indeed. Whether it came of something special in her constitution that happiness always made her quiet, as nothing but sorrow will some, I do not presume to say. I only know that, had her bliss changed suddenly to sadness, Kirsty would have been quiet still. Whatever came to Kirsty seemed right, for there it was!

She was now a girl of sixteen. The only sign she showed of interest in her person, appeared in her hair and the covering of her neck. Of one of the many middle shades of brown, with a rippling tendency to curl in it, her hair was parted with nicety, and drawn back from her face into a net of its own color, while her neckerchief was of blue silk. It covered a very white skin, leaving bare a brown throat. She wore a blue print wrapper, nowise differing from that of a peasant woman, and a blue winsey petticoat, beyond which appeared her bare feet, lovely in shape, and brown of hue. Her dress was nowise trim, and suggested neither tidiness nor disorder. The hem of the petticoat was in truth a little rent, but not more than might seem admissible where the rough wear was considered to which the garment was necessarily

exposed: when a little worse it would receive the proper attention, and be brought back to respectability! Kirsty grudged the time spent on her garments. She looked down on them as the moon might on the clouds around her. She made or mended them to wear them, not think about them.

Her forehead was wide and rather low, with straight eyebrows. Her eyes were of a gentle hazel, not the hazel that looks black at night. Her nose was strong, a little irregular, with plenty of substance, and sensitive nostrils. A decided and well-shaped chin dominated a neck by no means slender, and seemed to assert the superiority of the face over the whole beautiful body. Its chief expression was of a strong repose, a sweet, powerful peace, requiring but occasion to pass into determination. The sensitiveness of the nostrils, with the firmness in the meeting of the closed lips, suggested a faculty of indignation unsparing toward injustice; while the clearness of the heaven of the forehead gave confidence that such indignation would never show itself save for another.

I wish, presumptuous wish! that I could see the mind of a woman grow as she sits spinning or weaving: it would reveal the process next highest to creation. But the only hope of ever understanding such things lies in growing one's self. There is the still growth of the moonlit night of reverie; cloudy, with wind, and a little rain, comes the morning of thought, when the mind grows faster and the heart more slowly; then wakes the storm in the forest of human relation, tempest and lightning abroad, the soul enlarging by great bursts of vision and leaps of understanding and resolve; then floats up the mystic twi-

light eagerness, not unmingled with the dismay of compelled progress, when, bidding farewell to that which is behind, the soul is driven toward that which is before, grasping at it with all the hunger of the new birth. The story of God's universe lies in the growth of the individual soul. Kirsty's growth had been as yet quiet and steady.

Once more as she shifted her needle, her glance went flitting over the waste before her. This time there was more life in sight. Far away Kirsty descried something of the nature of man upon horse: to say how far, would have been as difficult for one unused to the flat moor as for a landsman to reckon distances at sea. Of the people of the place hardly another, even under the direction of Kirsty, could have contrived to see it. At length, after she had looked many times, she could clearly distinguish a youth on a strong, handsome hill-pony, and remained no longer in the slightest doubt as to who he was.

He came steadily over the dark surface of the moor, and it was clear that his pony must know the nature of the ground well; for now he galloped along as fast as he could go, now made a succession of short jumps, and now half-halted, and began slowly picking his way.

Kirsty watched his approach with gentle interest, while his every movement indicated eagerness. Gordon had seen her on the hill-side, probably long before she saw him, had been coming to her in as straight a line as the ground would permit, and at length was out of the boggy level, and ascending the slope of the hill-foot to where she sat. When he was within about twenty yards of her she gave him a

little nod, and then fixed her eyes on her knitting. He held on till within a few feet of her, then pulled up and threw himself from his pony's back. The creature, covered with foam, stood a minute panting, then fell to work on the short grass.

Francis had grown considerably, and looked almost a young man. He was a little older than Kirsty, but did not appear so, his expression being considerably younger than hers. Whether self-indulgence or aspiration was to come out of his evident joy in life, seemed yet undetermined. His countenance indicated nothing bad. He might well have represented one at the point before having to choose whether to go up or down hill. He was dressed a little showily in a short coat of dark tartan and a highland bonnet with a brooch and feather, and carried a lady's riding-whip—his mother's, no doubt—its top set with stones—so that his appearance was altogether a contrast to that of the girl. She was a peasant, he a gentleman! Her bare head and yet more her bare feet emphasized the contrast. But which was by nature and in fact the superior, no one with the least insight could have doubted.

He stood and looked at her, but neither spoke. She cast at length a glance upward, and said,

"Weel?"

Francis did not open his mouth. He seemed irresolute. Nothing in Kirsty's look or carriage or in the tone of her one word gave sign of consciousness that she was treating him, or he her, strangely. With complete self-possession she left the initiative to the one who had sought the interview: let him say why he had come!

In his face began to appear indication of growing displeasure. Two or three times he turned half away with a movement instantly checked which seemed to say that in a moment more, if there came no change, he would mount and ride: was this all his welcome?

At last she appeared to think she must take mercy on him: he used to say thirty words to her one!

"That's a bonny powny ye hae," she remarked, with a look at the creature as he fed.

"It's a' that," he answered dryly.

"Whaur did ye get it?" she asked.

"My mither coft (*bought*) it agen my hame-comin," he replied.

He prided himself on being able to speak the broadest of the dialect.

"She maun hae a straught e'e for a guid beast!" returned Kirsty, with a second glance at the pony.

"He's a bonny cratur and a willin," answered the youth. "He'll gang skelp throuw onything—watter onygait;—I'm no sae sure aboot fire."

A long silence followed, broken this time by the youth.

"Winna ye gie me luik nor word, and me ridden like mad to hae a sicht o' ye?" he said.

She glanced up at him.

"Weel ye hae that!" she answered, with a smile that showed her lovely white teeth: "ye're a' dubs (*all bemired*)! What for sud ye be in sic a hurry? Ye saw me no three days gane!"

"Ay, I saw ye, it's true; but I didna get a word o' ye!"

"Ye was free to say what ye likit! There was nane by but my mither!"

"Wud ye hae me say a'thing afore yer mither jist as I wud til ye yer lane (*alone*)?" he asked.

"Ay wud I," she returned. "Syne she would ken, 'ithoot my haein to tell her sic a geese as ye was!"

Had he not seen the sunny smile that accompanied her words he might well have taken offence.

"I wuss ye war anither sic-like!" he answered simply.

"Syne there wud be twa o' 's!" she returned, leaving him to interpret.

Silence again fell.

"Weel, what wud ye hae, Francie?" said Kirsty at length.

"I wud hae ye promise to merry me, Kirsty, come the time," he answered; "and that ye ken as weel as I dee mysel!"

"That's straucht oot ony gait!" rejoined Kirsty. "But ye see, Francie," she went on, "yer father, whan he left ye a kin' o' a legacy, as ye may ca' 't, to mine, hed no intention that *I* was to be left oot; neither had *my* father whan he acceppit o' 't!"

"I dinna unerstan ye ae styme (*one atom*)!" interrupted Gordon.

"Haud yer tongue and hearken," returned Kirsty. "What I'm meanin's this: what lies to my father's han' lies to mine as weel; and I'll never hae't kenned or said that, whan my father pu't (*pulled*) ae gait, I pu't anither!"

"Sakes, lassie! what *are* ye haverin at? Wud it be pu'in agen yer father to merry *me?*"

"It would be that."

"I dinna see hoo ye can mak it oot! I dinna see

hoo, bein' sic a frien' o' my father's, he sud objeck to my father's son!"

"Eh, but laddies *ir* gowks!" cried Kirsty. "My father was your father's frien' for *his* sake, no for his ain! He thinks o' what wud be guid for you, no for himsel!"

"Weel, but," persisted Gordon, "it wud be mair for my guid nor onything ither he could wuss for, to hae you for my wife!"

Kirsty's nostrils began to quiver, and her lip rose in a curve of scorn.

"A bonnie wife ye wud hae, Francie Gordon, wha, kennin her father doin ilka mortal thing for the love o' his auld maister an comrade, tuik the fine chance to mak her ain o' 't, and haud her grip o' the callan til hersel!—Think ye aither o' the auld men ever mintit at sic a thing as fatherin baith? That my father had a lass-bairn o' 's ain shawed mair nor onything the trust your father pat in 'im! Francie, the verra grave wud cast me oot for shame 'at I sud ance hae thoucht o' sic a thing! Man, it wud maist drive yer leddy-mither dementit!"

"It's my business, Kirsty, wha I merry!"

"And I houp yer grace 'll alloo it's pairt *my* business wha ye sall *not* marry—and that's me, Francie!"

Gordon sprang to his feet with such a look of wrath and despair as for a moment frightened Kirsty who was not easily frightened. She thought of the terrible bog-holes on the way her lover had come, sprang also to her feet, and caught him by the arm where, his foot already in the stirrup, he stood in the act of mounting.

"Francie! Francie!" she cried, "hearken to riz-

zon! There's no a body, man or wuman, I like better nor yersel to do ye ony guid or turn o' guid—cep' my father, of coorse, and my mither, and my ain Steenie!"

"And hoo mony mair, gien I had the wull to hear the lang bible-chapter o' them, and see mysel' comin in at the tail o' them a', like the hin'most sheep, takin his bite as he cam? Na, na! it's time I was hame, and had my slip on, and was astride o' a stick! Gien ye had a score o' idiot brithers ye wud care mair for ilk ane o' them nor for me! I canna bide to think o' 't."

"It's true a' the same, whether ye can bide to think o' 't or no, Francie!" returned the girl, her face, which had been very pale, now rosy with indignation. "My Steenie's mair to me nor a' the Gordons thegither, Bow-o'-meal or Jock-and-Tam as ye like!"

She drew back, sat down again to the stocking she was knitting for Steenie, and left her lover to mount and ride, which he did without another word.

"There's mair nor ae kin' o' idiot," she said to herself, "and Steenie's no the kin' that oucht to be ca'd ane. There's mair in Steenie nor in sax Francie Gordons!"

If ever Kirsty came to love a man, it would be just nothing to her to die for him; but then it never would have been anything to her to die for her father or her mother or Steenie!

Gordon galloped off at a wild pace, as if he would drive his pony straight athwart the terrible moss, taking hag and well-eye as it came. But glancing behind and seeing that Kirsty was not looking after him, he turned the creature's head in a safer direction, and left the moss at his back.

CHAPTER IV

DOG—STEENIE

SHE sat for some time at the foot of the hill, motionless as itself, save for her hands. The sun shone on in silence, and the blue butterflies which haunted the little bush of bluebells, that is harebells, beside her, made no noise; only a stray bee, happy in the pale heat, made a little music to please itself—and perhaps the butterflies. Kirsty had an unusual power of sitting still, even with nothing for her hands to do. On the present occasion, however, her hands and fingers went faster than usual—not entirely from eagerness to finish her stocking, but partly from her displeasure with Francie. At last she broke her "worset," drew the end of the thread through the final loop, and, drawing it, rose and scanned the side of the hill. Not far off she spied the fleecy backs of a few feeding sheep, and straightway sent out on the still air a sweet, strong, musical cry. It was instantly responded to by a bark from somewhere up the hill. She sat down, clasped her hands over her knees, and waited.

She had not to wait long. A sound of rushing came through the heather, and in a moment or two a fine collie, with long, silky, wavy coat of black and brown, and one white spot on his face, shot out of the heather, sprang upon her, and, setting his paws

on her shoulders, began licking her face. She threw her arms round him, and addressed him in words of fondling rebuke:—

"Ye ill-mannered tyke!" she said; "what richt hae ye to tak the place o' yer betters? Gang awa doon wi' ye, and wait. What for sud ye tak advantage o' your four legs to his twa, and him the maister o' ye! But, eh man, ye're a fine doggie, and I canna bide the thoucht that yer langest day maun be sae short, and tak ye awa hame sae lang afore the lave o' 's!"

While she scolded, she let him caress her as he pleased. Presently he left her, and going a yard or two away, threw himself on the grass with such *abandon* as no animal but a weary dog seems capable of reaching. He had made haste to be first that he might caress her before his master came. Now he heard him close behind, and knew his opportunity was over.

Stephen came next out of the heather, creeping to Kirsty's feet on all-fours. He was a gaunt, long-backed lad, who, at certain seasons, undetermined, either imagined himself the animal he imitated, or had some notion of being required, or, possibly, compelled to behave like a dog. When the fit was upon him, all the day long he would speak no word even to his sister, would only bark or give a low growl like the collie. In this last he succeeded much better than in running like him, although, indeed, his arms were so long that it was comparatively easy for him to use them as forelegs. He let his head hang low as he went, throwing it up to bark, and sinking it yet lower when he growled, which was seldom, and

to those that loved him indicated great trouble. He did not like Snootie raise himself on his hind legs to caress his sister, but gently subsided upon her feet, and there lay panting, his face to the earth, and his forearms crossed beneath his nose.

Kirsty stooped, and stroked and patted him as if he were the dog he seemed fain to be. Then drawing her feet from under him, she rose, and going a little way up the hill to the hut, returned presently with a basin full of rich-looking milk and *a quarter* of thick oat-cake which she had brought from home in the morning. The milk she set beside her as she resumed her seat. Then she put her feet again under the would-be dog, and proceeded to break small pieces from the oat-cake and throw them to him. He sought every piece eagerly as it fell, but with his mouth only, never moving either hand, and seemed to eat it with a satisfaction worthy of his simulated nature. When the oat-cake was gone, she set the bowl before him, and he drank the milk with care and neatness, never putting a hand to steady it.

"Now you must have a sleep, Steenie!" said his sister.

She rose, and he crawled slowly after her up the hill on his hands and knees. All the time he kept his face down, and, his head hanging toward the earth, his long hair hid it quite. He strongly suggested a great Skye-terrier.

When they reached the hut, Kirsty went in, and Steenie crept after her. They had covered the floor of it with heather, the stalks set upright and close packed, so that, even where the bells were worn off, it still made a thick long-piled carpet, elastic and

warm. When the door was shut, they were snug there even in winter.

Inside, the hut was about six feet long, and four wide. Its furniture was a little deal table and one low chair. In the turf of which the wall consisted, at the farther end from the door, Kirsty had cut out a small oblong recess, to serve as a shelf for her books. The hut was indeed her library, for in that bole stood, upright, with its back to the room, in proper and tidy fashion, almost every book she could call her own. They were about a dozen, several with but one board and some with no title, one or two very old, and all well used. Most of her time there, when she was not knitting, Kirsty spent in reading and thinking about what she read; many a minute, even when she was knitting, she managed to read as well. She had read two of Sir Walter's novels, and several of the Ettrick-Shepherd's shorter tales, which the schoolmaster had lent her; but on her shelf and often in her hands were a Shakspere, a Milton, and a translation of Klopstock's "Messiah"—which she liked far better than the "Paradise Lost," though she did not admire it nearly so much. Of the latter she would say, "It's unco gran', but it never maks my hert grit (*great*)," meaning that it never caused her any emotion. Among her treasures was also a curious old book of ghost-stories, concerning which the sole remark she was ever heard to make was, that she would like to know whether they were true: she thought Steenie could tell, but she would not question him about them. Ramsay's "Gentle Shepherd" was there too, which she liked for the good sense in it. There was a thumbed edition of

Burns also, but I do not think much of the thumbing was Kirsty's, though she had several of his best poems by heart.

Between the ages of ten and fifteen Kirsty had gone to the parish school of the nearest town: it looked a village, but they always called it *the town*. There a sister of her father lived, and with her she was welcome to spend the night, so that she was able to go in most weathers. But when she stayed there, her evening was mostly spent at the schoolmaster's. Mr. Craig was an elderly man, who had married late, and lost his wife early. She had left him one child, a delicate, dainty, golden-haired thing, some three or four years younger than Kirsty, who cherished for her a love and protection quite maternal. Kirsty was one of the born mothers, who are not only of the salt, but are the sugar and shelter of the world. I doubt if little Phemie would have learned anything but for Kirsty. Not to the day of her death did her father see in her anything but the little girl his wife had left him. He spoiled her a good deal, nor ever set himself to instruct her, leaving it apparently to the tendency of things to make of her a woman like her mother.

He was a real student, and excellent teacher. When first he came as schoolmaster to Tiltowie, he was a divinity student, but a man so far of thought original that he saw lions in the way of becoming a minister. Such men as would be servants of the church before they are slaves of the church's Master will never be troubled with Mr. Craig's difficulties. For one thing, his strong poetic nature made it impossible for him to believe in a dull, prosaic God:

when told that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, he found himself unable to imagine them inferior to ours! The natural result was that he remained a schoolmaster—to the advantage of many a pupil, and very greatly to the advantage of Kirsty, whose nature was peculiarly open to his influences. The dominie said he had never had a pupil that gave him such satisfaction as Kirsty; she seemed to anticipate and catch at everything he wanted to make hers. There was no knowledge, he declared, that he could offer her, which the lassie from Corbyknowe would not take in like her porridge. Best thing of all for her was that, following his own predilections, he paid far more attention in his class for English to poetry than to prose. Colin Craig was himself no indifferent poet, and was even a master of the more recondite forms of verse. If, in some measure led astray by the merit of the form, he was capable of admiring verse essentially inferior, he yet certainly admired the better poetry more. He had, besides, the faculty of perceiving whether what he had written would or would not *convey* his thought—a faculty in which even a great poet may be deficient.

In a word Kirsty learned everything Mr. Craig brought within her reach; and long after she left school, the Saturday on which she did not go to see him was a day of disappointment both to the domimie and to his little Phemie.

When she had once begun to follow a thing, Kirsty would never leave the trail of it. Her chief business as well as delight was to look after Steenie, but perfect attention to him left her large opportunity of pursuing her studies, especially at such seasons in

which his peculiar affection, whatever it really was, required hours of untimely sleep. For, although at other times he wandered at his will without her, he always wanted to be near her when he slept; while she, satisfied that so he slept better, had not once at such a time left him. During summer, and as long before and after as the temperature permitted, the hut was the place he preferred when his necessity was upon him; and it was Kirsty's especial delight to sit in it on a warm day, the door open and her brother asleep on her feet, reading and reading while the sun went down the sky, to fill the hut as he set with a glory of promise; after which came the long gloamin, like a life out of which the light but not the love has vanished. Then indeed she neither worked nor read, but brooded over many things.

Leaving the door open behind them, Kirsty took a book from the bole, and seated herself on the low chair; instantly Steenie, who had waited motionless until she was settled, threw himself across her feet on the carpet of heather, and in a moment was fast asleep.

There they remained, the one reading, the other sleeping, while the hours of the warm summer afternoon slipped away, ripples on the ocean of the lovely, changeless eternity, the consciousness of God. For a time the watching sister was absorbed in "King Lear;" then she fell to wondering whether *Cordelia* was not unkindly stiff toward her old father, but perceived at length that, with such sisters listening, she could not have spoken otherwise. Then she wondered whether there could be women so bad as *Goneril* and *Regan*, concluding that Shakspere must

know better than she. At last she drew her bare feet from under Steenie, and put them on his back, where the coolness was delightful. Then first she became aware that the sun was down and the gloamin come, and that the whole world must be feeling just like her feet. The long clear twilight, which would last till morning, was about her, the eerie sleeping day, when the lovely ghosts come out of their graves in the long grass, and walk about in the cool world, with little ghostly sighs at sight of the old places, and fancy they are dreaming. Kirsty was always willing to believe in ghosts: awake in the dark nights she did not; but in her twilight reveries she grew very nearly a ghost herself.

It was a wonder she could sit so long and not feel worn out, but Kirsty was exceptionally strong, in absolute health, and specially gifted with patience. She had so early entertained, and so firmly grasped the idea that she was sent into the world expressly to take care of Steenie, that devotion to him had grown into a happy habit with her. The waking mind gave itself up to the sleeping, the orderly to the troubled brain, the true heart to the heart as true.

CHAPTER V

COLONEL AND SERGEANT

THERE was no difference of feeling betwixt the father and mother in regard to this devotion of Kirsty's very being to her Steenie; but the mother in especial was content with it, for while Kirsty was the apple of her eye, Steenie was her one loved anxiety.

David Barclay, a humble unit in the widespread and distinguished family of the Barclays or Berkeleys, was born, like his father and grandfather and many more of his ancestors, on the same farm he now occupied. While his father was yet alive, with an elder son to succeed him, David *listed*—mainly from a strong desire to be near a school-friend, then an ensign in the service of the East India Company. Throughout their following military career they were in the same regiment, the one rising to be colonel, the other sergeant-major. All the time the schoolboy attachment went on deepening in the men; and all the time was never man more respectfully obedient to orders than David Barclay to those of the superior officer with whom in private he was on terms of intimacy. As often as they could without attracting notice, the comrades threw aside all distinction of rank, and were again the Archie Gordon and Davie Barclay of old school days—as real to them still as

those of the hardest battles they had fought together. In more primitive Scotland, such relations are, or were more possible than in countries where more divergent habits of life occasion wider social separations. And then these were sober-minded men, who neither made much of the shows of the world, nor were greedy after distinction, which is the mere coffin wherein Duty-done lies buried.

When they returned to their country, both somewhat disabled, the one retired to his inherited estate, the other to the family farm upon that estate, where his brother had died shortly before; so that Archie was now Davie's landlord. But no new relation would ever destroy the friendship which school had made close, and war had welded. Almost every week the friends met and spent the evening together—much oftener, by and by, at Corbyknowe than at Castle Weelset. For both married soon after their return, and their wives were of different natures.

"My colonel has the glory," Barclay said once, and but once, to his sister, "but, puir fallow, I hae the wife!" And truly the wife at the farm had in her material enough, both moral and intellectual, for ten ladies better than the wife at the castle.

David's wife brought him a son the first year of their marriage, and the next year came a son to the colonel and a daughter to the sergeant. One night, as the two fathers sat together at the farm, some twelve hours after the birth of David's girl, they mutually promised that the survivor would do his best for the child of the other. Before he died the colonel would gladly have taken his boy from his wife and given him to his old comrade.

As to Steenie the elder of David's children, he was yet unborn when his father, partly in consequence of a wound from which he never quite recovered, met with rather a serious accident through a young horse in the harvest-field, and the report reached his wife that he was killed. To the shock she thus received was generally attributed the peculiarity of the child, prematurely born within a month after. He had long passed the age at which children usually begin to walk, before he would even attempt to stand, but he had grown capable of a speed on all-fours that was astonishing. When at last he did walk, it was for more than two years with the air of one who had learned a trick; and throughout his childhood and a great part of his boyhood, he was always more ready to go on all-fours than on his feet.

CHAPTER VI

MAN—STEENIE

THE sleeping youth began at length to stir: it was more than an hour before he quite woke up. Then all at once he started to his feet with his eyes wide open, putting back from his forehead the long hair which fell over them, and revealing a face not actually looking old, but strongly suggesting age. His eyes were of a pale blue, with a hazy, mixed, uncertain gleam in them, reminding one of the shifty shudder and shake and start of the northern lights at some heavenly version of the game of Puss in the Corner. His features were more than good; they would have been grand had they been large, but they were peculiarly small. His head itself was very small in proportion to his height, his forehead, again, large in proportion to his head, while his chin was such as we are in the way of calling strong. Although he had been all day acting a dog in charge of sheep, and treating the collie as his natural companion, there was, both in his countenance and its expression, a remarkable absence of the animal. He had a kind of exaltation in his look; he seemed to expect something, not at hand but sure to come. His eyes rested for a moment, with a love of absolute devotion, on the face of his sister; then he knelt at her feet, and, as if to receive her blessing,

bowed his head before her. She laid her hand upon it, and in a tone of unutterable tenderness said, "Man-Steenie!" Instantly he rose to his feet. Kirsty rose also, and they went out of the hut.

The sunlight had not left the west, but had crept round some distance toward the north. Stars were shining faint through the thin shadows of the world. Steenie stretched himself up, threw his arms aloft, and held them raised, as if at once he would grow and reach toward the infinite. Then he looked down on Kirsty, for he was taller than she, and pointed straight up, with the long lean forefinger of one of the long lean arms that had all day been a leg to the would-be dog—into the heavens, and smiled. Kirsty looked up, nodded her head, and smiled in return. Then they started in the direction of home, and for some time walked in silence. At length Steenie spoke. His voice was rather feeble, but clear, articulate, and musical.

"My feet's terrible heavy the nicht, Kirsty!" he said. "Gien it wasna for them, the lave o' me wud be up and awa. It's terrible to be hauden doon by the feet this gait!"

"We're a' hauden doon the same gait, Steenie. Maybe it's some waur for you 'at would sae fain gang up, nor for the lave o' 's 'at's mair willin to bide a wee; but it 'll be the same at the last whan we're a' up there thegither."

"I wudna care sae muckle gien he didna grip me by the queets (*ankles*), like! I dinna like to be grippit by the queets! He winna lat me win at the thongs!"

"Whan the richt time comes," returned Kirsty

solemnly, "the bonny man 'll lowse the thongs himsel."

"Ay, ay! I ken that weel. It was me 'at tellt ye. He tauld me himsel! I'm thinkin I'll see him the nicht, for I'm sair hauden doon, sair needin a sicht o' 'im. He's whiles lang o' comin!"

"I dinna won'er 'at ye're sae fain to see 'im, Steenie!"

"I *am* that; fain, fain!"

"Ye'll see 'im or lang. It's a fine thing to hae patience."

"Ye come ilka day, Kirsty: what for sudna he come ilka nicht?"

"He has reasons, Steenie. He kens best."

"Ay, he kens best. I ken naething but him—and you, Kirsty!"

Kirsty said no more. Her heart was too full.

Steenie stood still, and throwing back his head, stared for some moments up into the great heavens over him. Then he said:

"It's a bonny day, the day the bonny man bides in! The ither day—the day the lave o' ye bides in—the day whan I'm no mysel but a sair ooncomfortable collie—that day's ower het—and sometimes ower cauld; but the day he bides in is aye jist what a day sud be! Ay, it's that! it's that!"

He threw himself down, and lay for a minute looking up into the sky. Kirsty stood and regarded him with loving eyes.

"I hae a' the bonny day afore me!" he murmured to himself. "Eh, but it's better to be a man nor a beast! Snootie's a fine beast, and a gran' collie, but I wud raither be mysel—a heap raither—aye at

han' to catch a sicht o' the bonny man! Ye maun gang hame to yer bed, Kirsty!—Is't the bonny man comes til ye i' yer dreams and says, 'Gang til him, Kirsty, and be mortal guid til him'? It maun be surely that!"

"Willna ye gang wi' me, Steenie, as far as the door?" rejoined Kirsty, almost beseechingly, and attempting no answer to what he had last said.

It was at times such as this that Kirsty knew sadness. When she had to leave her brother on the hill-side all the long night, to look on no human face, hear no human word, but wander in strangest worlds of his own throughout the slow dark hours, the sense of a separation worse than death would wrap her as in a shroud. In his bodily presence, however far away in thought or sleep or dreams his soul might be, she could yet tend him with her love; but when he was out of her sight, and she had to sleep and forget him, where was Steenie and how was he faring? Then he seemed to her as one forsaken, left alone with his sorrows to an existence companionless and dreary. But in truth Steenie was by no means to be pitied. However much his life was apart from the lives of other men, he did not therefore live alone. Was he not still of more value than many sparrows? And Kirsty's love for him had in it no shadow of despair. Her pain at such times was but the indescribable love-lack of mothers when their sons are far away, and they do not know what they are doing, what they are thinking; or when their daughters seem to have departed from them or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl broken. And yet how few, when the air of this world is clearest, ever

come into essential contact with those they love best! But the triumph of Love, while most it seems to delay, is yet ceaselessly rushing hitherward on the wings of the morning.

"Willna ye gang as far as the door wi' me, Steenie?" she said.

"I wull do that, Kirsty. But ye're no feart, are ye?"

"Na, no a grain! What would I be feart for?"

"Ow, naething! At this time there's naething oot and aboot to be feart at. In what ye ca' the daytime, I'm a kin' o' in danger o' knockin mysel again things; I never do that at nicht."

As he spoke he sprang to his feet, and they walked on. Kirsty's heart seemed to swell with pain; for Steenie was at once more rational and more strange than usual, and she felt the farther away from him. His words were very quiet, but his eyes looked full of stars.

"I canna tell what it is aboot the sun 'at maks a dog o' me!" he said. "He's hard-like, and hauds me oot, and gars me hing my heid, and feel as gien I wur a kin' o' ashamed, though I ken o' naething. But the bonny nicht comes straught up to me, and into me, and gangs a' throuw me, and bides i' me; and syne I luik for the bonny man!"

"I wuss ye wud lat me bide oot the nicht wi' ye, Steenie!"

"What for that, Kirsty? Ye maun sleep, and I'm better my lane."

"That's jist hit!" returned Kirsty, with a deep-drawn sigh. "I canna bide yer bein yer lane, and yet, do what I like, I canna, whiles, even i' the day-

time, win a bit nearer til ye! Gien only ye was as little as ye used to be, whan I cud carry ye aboot a' day, and tak ye intil my ain bed a' nicht! But noo we're jist like the sun and the mune!—whan ye're oot, I'm in; and whan ye're in—weel I'm no oot, but my sowl's jist as blear-faced as the mune i' the daylicht to think ye'll be awa again sae sune!—But it *canna* gan on like this to a' eternity, and that's a comfort!"

"I ken naething aboot eternity. I'm thinkin it 'll a' turn intil a lown starry nicht, wi' the bonny man intil't. I'm sure o' ae thing, and that only—'at something 'ill be putten richt 'at's far frae richt the noo; and syne, Kirsty, ye'll hae yer ain gait wi' me, and I'll be sae far like ither fowk: idiot 'at I am, I wud be sorry to be turnt a'thegither the same as some! Ye see I ken sae muckle they ken naething aboot or they wudna be as they are! It maybe disna become *me* to say't, ony mair nor Gowk Murnock 'at sits o' the pu'pit stair; but eh the styte (*nonsense*) oor minister dings oot o' his ain heid, as gien it war the stoor oot o' the bible-cushion! It's no possible he's ever seen the bonny man as I hae seen him!"

"We'll a' hae to come ower to you, Steenie, and learn frae ye what ye ken. We'll hae to mak *you* the minister, Steenie!"

"Na, na; I ken naething for ither fowk—only for mysel; and that's whiles mair nor I can win roun', no to say gie again!"

"Some nicht ye'll lat me bide oot wi' ye a' nicht? I wud sair like it, Steenie!"

"Ye sall, Kirsty; but it maun be some nicht ye hae sleepit a' day."

"Eh, but I cudna do that, tried I ever sae hard!"

"Ye cud lie i' yer bed ony gait, and mak the best o' 't! *Ye* hae naebody, I ken, to gar *you* sleep!"

They went all the rest of the way talking thus, and Kirsty's heart grew lighter, for she seemed to get a little nearer to her brother. He had been her live doll and idol ever since his mother laid him in her arms when she was little more than three years old. For though Steenie was nearly a year older than Kirsty, she was at that time so much bigger that she was able, not indeed to carry him, but to nurse him on her knees. She thought herself the elder of the two until she was about ten, by which time she could not remember any beginning to her carrying of him. About the same time, however, he began to grow much faster, and she found before long that only upon her back could she carry him any distance.

The discovery that he was the elder somehow gave a fresh impulse to her love and devotion, and intensified her pitiful tenderness. Kirsty's was indeed a heart in which the whole unhappy world might have sought and found shelter. She had the notion, notwithstanding, that she was harder-hearted than most, and therefore better able to do things that were right but not pleasant.

CHAPTER VII

CORBYKNOWE

"YE'LL come in and say a word to mother, Steenie?" said Kirsty, as they came near the door of the house.

It was a long, low building, with a narrow paving in front from end to end, of stones cast up by the plough. Its walls, but one story high, rough-cast and whitewashed, shone dim in the twilight. Under a thick projecting thatch the door stood wide open, and from the kitchen, whose door was also open, came the light of a peat-fire and a fish-oil-lamp. Throughout the summer Steenie was seldom in the house an hour out of the twenty-four, and now he hesitated to enter. In the winter he would keep about it a good part of the day, and was generally indoors the greater part of the night, but by no means always.

While he hesitated, his mother appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. She was a tall, fine-looking woman, with soft gray eyes, and an expression of form and features which left Kirsty accounted for.

"Come awa in by, Steenie, my man!" she said, in a tone that seemed to wrap its object in fold upon fold of tenderness, enough to make the peat-smoke that pervaded the kitchen seem the very atmosphere of the heavenly countries. "Come and hae a drappy o' new-milkit milk, and a piece (*piece of bread*)."

Steenie stood smiling and undecided on the slab in front of the door-step.

"Dreid naething, Steenie," his mother went on. "There's no ane to interfere wi' yer wull, whatever it be. The hoose is yer ain to come and gang as ye see fit. But ye ken that, and Kirsty kens that, as weel's yer father and mysel."

"Mother, I ken what ye say to be the trowth, and I hae a gran' pooer o' believin the trowth. But a'body believes their ain mither: that's i' the order o' things as they were first startit! Still I wud raither no come in the nicht. I wud raither haud awa and no tribble ye wi' mair o' the sicht o' me nor I canna help—that is, till the cheenge come, and things be set richt. I dinna aye ken what I'm aboot, but I aye ken 'at I'm a kin' o' a disgrace to ye, though I canna tell hoo I'm to blame for't. Sae I'll jist bide theroot wi' the bonny stars 'at's aye theroot, and kens a' aboot it, and disna think nane the waur o' me."

"Laddie! laddie! wha on the face o' God's yerth thinks the waur o' ye for a wrang dune ye?—though wha has the wyte o' that same I daurna think, weel kennin 'at a'thing's aither ordeent or allooed, makin muckle the same. Come winter, come summer, come richt, come wrang, come life, come deith, what are ye, what can ye be, but my ain, ain laddie!"

Steenie stepped across the threshold and followed his mother into the kitchen, where the pot was already on the fire for the evening's porridge. To hide her emotion she went straight to it, and lifted the lid to look whether boiling point had arrived. The same instant the stalwart form of her husband

appeared in the doorway, and there stood for a single moment arrested.

He was a good deal older than his wife, as his long gray hair, among other witnesses, testified. He was six feet in height, and very erect, with a rather stiff, military carriage. His face wore an expression of stern good-will, as if he had been sent to do his best for everybody, and knew it.

Steenie caught sight of him ere he had taken a step into the kitchen. He rushed to him, threw his arms round him, and hid his face on his bosom.

"Bonny, bonny man!" he murmured, then turned away and went back to the fire.

His mother was casting the first handful of meal into the pot. Steenie fetched a *three-leggit creepie* and sat down by her, looking as if he had sat there every night since first he was able to sit.

The farmer came forward, and drew a chair to the fire beside his son. Steenie laid his head on his father's knee, and the father laid his big hand on Steenie's head. Not a word was uttered. The mother might have found them in her way had she been inclined, but the thought did not come to her, and she went on making the porridge in great contentment, while Kirsty laid the cloth. The night was as still in the house as in the world, save for the bursting of the big blobs of the porridge. The peat fire made no noise.

The mother at length took the heavy pot from the fire, and, with what to one inexpert might have seemed wonderful skill, poured the porridge into a huge wooden bowl on the table. Having then scraped the pot carefully that nothing should be lost,

she poured some water into it, and setting it on the fire again, went to a hole in the wall, took thence two eggs, and placed them gently in it.

She went next to the dairy, and came back with a jug of the richest milk, which she set beside the porridge; whereupon they drew their seats to the table—all but Steenie.

"Come, Steenie," said his mother, "here's yer supper."

"I dinna care aboot ony supper the nicht, mother," answered Steenie.

"Guidsake, laddie, I kenna hoo ye live!" she returned in an accent almost of despair.

"I'm thinkin I dinna need sae muckle as ither fowk," rejoined Steenie, whose white face bore testimony that he took far from nourishment enough. "Ye see I'm no a' there," he added with a smile, "sae I canna need sae muckle!"

"There's eneuch o' ye there to fill my hert unco fou," answered his mother with a deep sigh. "Come awa, Steenie, my bairn!" she went on coaxingly. "Yer father winna ate a moufu' gien ye dinna: ye'll see that!—Eh, Steenie," she broke out, "gien ye wud but tak yer supper and gang to yer bed like the lave o' 's! It gars my hert swall as gien't wud burst like a blob to think o' ye oot i' the mirk nicht! Wha's to tell what michtna be happenin ye! Oor herts are whiles that sair, yer father's and mine, i' oor beds, 'at we daurna say a word for fear the tane set the tither greetin."

"I'll bide in, gien that be yer wull," replied Steenie; "but eh, gien ye kent the differ to me, ye wudna wuss't. I seldom sleep at nicht as ye ken, and i'

the hoose it's jist as gien the darkness wan inside o' me, and was chokin me."

"But it's as dark theroot as i' the hoose—whiles, onygait!"

"Na, mother; it's never sae dark theroot but there's licht eneuch to ken *I'm* theroot and no i' the hoose. I can aye draw a guid full breath oot i' the open."

"Lat the laddie gang his ain gait, 'uman," interposed David. "The thing born in 'im 's better for him nor the thing born in anither. A man maun gang as God made him."

"Ay, whether he be man or dog!" assented Steenie solemnly.

He drew his stool close to his father where he sat at the table, and again laid his head on his knee. The mother sighed but said nothing. She looked nowise hurt, only very sad. In a minute, Steenie spoke again:

"I'm thinkin nane o' ye kens," he said, "what it's like whan a' the hill-side's gien up to the ither anes!"

"What ither anes?" asked his mother. "There can be nane there but yer ain lane sel!"

"Ay, there's a' the lave o' 's," he rejoined, with a wan smile.

The mother looked at him with something almost of fear in her eyes of love.

"Steenie has company we ken little aboot," said Kirsty. "I whiles think I wud gie him my wits for his company."

"Ay, the bonny man!" murmured Steenie. "—I maun be gauin!"

But he did not rise, did not even lift his head from

his father's knee: it would be rude to go before the supper was over—the ruder that he was not partaking of it!

David had eaten his porridge, and now came the almost nightly difference about the eggs. Marion had been "the perfect spy o' the time" in taking them from the pot, but when she would as usual have her husband eat them, he as usual declared he neither needed nor wanted them. This night, however, he did not insist, but at once proceeded to prepare one, with which, as soon as it was nicely mixed with salt, he began to feed Steenie. The boy had been longer used to being thus fed than most children, and now took the first mouthful instinctively, and then moved his head, but without raising it from his knee, so that his father could feed him more comfortably. In this position he took every spoonful given him, and so ate both the eggs, greatly to the delight of all the rest of the company.

A moment more and Steenie got up. His father rose also.

"I'll convoy ye a bit, my man," he said.

"Eh, na! ye needna that, father! It's nearhan' yer bed-time! I hae naegait to be convoyt. I'll jist be aboot i' the nicht—maybe a stanes-cast frae the door, maybe the tither side o' the Horn. Here or there I'm never frae ye. I think whiles I'm jist like ane o' them 'at ye ca' deid: I'm no awa; I'm only deid!"

So saying, he went. He never on any occasion wished them good-night: that would be to leave them, and he was not leaving them! he was with them all the time!

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID AND HIS DAUGHTER

THE instant he was gone, Kirsty went a step or two nearer to her father, and, looking up in his face, said,

"I saw Francie Gordon the day, father."

"Weel, lassie, I reckon that wasna ony ferly (*strange occurrence*)! Whaur saw ye him?"

"He cam to me o' the Hornside, whaur I sat weyvin my stockin, ower the bog on's powny—a richt bonny thing, and clever—a new ane he's gotten frae's mither. And it's no the first time he's been owre there to see me sin' he cam hame!"

"Whatfor gied he there? My door's aye been open till's father's son!"

"He kenned whaur he was likest to see me: it was me he wantit."

"He wantit you, did he? An' he's been mair nor ance efter ye?—Whatfor didna ye tell me afore, Kirsty?"

"We war bairns thegither, ye ken, father, and I never ance thoucht the thing worth fashin ye aboot till the day. We've aye been used to Francie comin and gaein! I never tellt my mither onything he said, and I tell her a'thing worth tellin, and mony a thing forby. I aye leuch at him as I would at a bairn till the day. He spak straucht oot the day, and I did

the same, and angert him; and syne he angert me."

"And whatfor are ye tellin me noo?"

"'Cause it cam intil my heid that maybe it would be better—no that it maks ony differ I can see."

During this conversation Marion was washing the supper-things, putting them away, and making general preparation for bed. She heard every word and went about her work softly that she might hear, never opening her mouth to speak.

"There's something ye want to tell me and dinna like, lassie!" said David. "Gien ye be feart at yer father, gang til yer mither."

"Feart at my father! I would be, gien I had onything to be ashamet o'. Syne I micht gang to my mither, I daursay—I dinna ken."

"Ye would that, lassie! Fathers maun sometimes be fearsome to lass-bairns!"

"Whan I'm feart at you, father, I'll be a gey bit on i' the ill gait!" returned Kirsty, with a solemn face, looking straight into her father's eyes.

"Than it'll never be, or I maun hae a heap to blame mysel for! I think whiles, gien bairns kenned the terrible wyte their fathers micht hae to dree for no doin better wi' them, they wud be mair particular to haud straucht. I hae been owre muckle taen up wi' my beasts and my craps—mair, God forgie me, than wi' my twa bairns; though, God kens, ye're mair to me, the twa, than oucht else save the mither o' ye!"

"The beasts and the craps cudna weel do wi' less: there was aye oor mither to see efter hiz!"

"That's true, lassie! I only houp it wasna greed

at the hert o' me! At the same time, wha wud I be greedy for but yersels?—Weel, and what's it a' aboot? What garred ye come to me aboot Francie? I'm some feart for him whiles, noo 'at he's sae muckle oot o' oor sicht. The laddie's no by natur an ill laddie—far frae 't! but it's a sore pity he cudna hae been a' his father's, an nane o' him his mither's!"

"That wudna hae been sae weel contrived, I doobt!" remarked Kirsty. "There wudna hae been the variety, I'm thinking!"

"Ye're richt there, lass!—But what's this aboot Francie?"

"Ow naething, father, worth mentionin! The daft loon would hae had me promise to merry him—that's a'!"

"The Lord preserve's!—Aff han'?"

"There's no tellin what micht hae been i' the heid o' 'im: he didna win sae far as to say that onygait!"

"God forbid!" exclaimed her father with solemnity, after a short pause.

"I'm thinkin God's forbidden langsyne!" rejoined Kirsty.

"What said ye til 'im, lassie?"

"First I leuch at him—as weel as I can min' the nonsense o' 't—and ca'd him the gowk he was; and syne I sent him awa' wi' a flee in's lug: hadna he the impidence to fa' oot upo' me for carin mair aboot Steenie nor the likes o' him! As gien even *he* cud come 'ithin sicht o' Steenie!"

Her father looked very grave.

"Are ye no pleased, father? I did what I thoucht richt."

"Ye cudna hae dune better, Kirsty. But I'm

sorry for the callan, for eh but I loed his father! Lassie, for his father's sake I cud tak Francie intil the hoose, and work for him as for you and Steenie —though it's little guid Steenie ever gets o' me, puir sowl!"

"Dinna say that, father. It wud be an ill thing for Steenie to hae onybody but yersel to the father o' 'im! A muckle pairt o' the nicht he wins ower in loein at you and his mother."

"And yersel, Kirsty."

"I'm thinkin I hae my share i' the daytime."

"And hoo, think ye, gangs the lave o' the nicht wi' 'im?"

"The bonny man has the maist o' 't, I dinna doobt, and what better cud we desire for 'im!—But, father, gien Francie come back wi' the same tale—I dinna think he wull efter what I telled him, but he may—what wud ye hae me say til 'im?"

"Say what ye wull, lassie, sae lang as ye dinna lat him for a moment believe there's a grain o' possibility in the thing. Ye see, Kirsty,—"

"Ye dinna imaigine, father, I cud for ae minute think itherwise aboot it than ye du yersel! Div I no ken that his father gied him in chairge to you? and haena I therefore to luik efter him? Didna ye tell me a' aboot yer gran' frien, and hoo, and hoo lang ye had loed him? and didna that mak Francie my business as weel's yer ain? I'm verra sure his father would never appruv o' ony gaeins on atween him and a lassie sic like's mysel; and fearna ye, father, but I s' haud him weel ootby. No that it's ony tyauve (*struggle*) to me, though I aye likit Francie! Haena I my ain Steenie?"

"Glaidly wud I shaw Francie the ro'd to sic a wife as ye wud mak him, my bonny Kirsty! But ye see clearly the thing itsel's no to be thoucht upon.—Eh, Kirsty, but it's gran' to an auld father's hert to hear ye tak yer pairt in his devours efter sic a wumanly fashion!"

"Am I no yer ain lass-bairn, father? Whaur wud I be wi' a father that didna keep his word? and what less cud I du nor help ony man to keep his word? Gien breach o' the faimily-word cam throuw me, my life wud gang frae me. Wad ye hae me tell the laddie's mither? I wudna like to expose the folly o' him, but gien ye think it necessar, I'll gang the morn's mornin."

"I dinna think that wud be weel. It wad but raise a strife atween the twa, ohn dune an atom o' guid. She wud only rage at the laddie, and pit him in sic a reid heat as wad but wald thegither him and his wull sae 'at they wud maist never come in twa again. And though ye gaed and tauld her yer ain sel, my lady wad lay a' the wyte upo' you nane the less. There's no rizzon, tap nor tae, i' the puir body, and ye're naewise b'und to her farther nor to do richt by her."

"I'm glaid ye dinna want me to gang," answered Kirsty. "She carries hersel that gran' 'at ye're maist driven to the consideration hoo little she's worth; and that's no the richt speerit anent onybody God thoucht worth makin."

CHAPTER IX

AT CASTLE WEELSET

FRANCIE'S anger had died down a good deal by the time he reached home. He was, as his father's friend had just said, by no means a bad sort of fellow, only he was full of himself, and therefore of little use to anybody. His mother and he, when not actually at strife, were constantly on the edge of a quarrel. The two must have their own way, each of them. Francie's way was sometimes good, his mother's sometimes not bad, but both were usually selfish. The boy had fits of generosity, the woman never, except toward her son. If she thought of something to please him, good and well! if he wanted anything of her, it would never do! The idea must be her own, or meet with no favor. If she imagined her son desired a thing, she felt it one she never could grant, and told him so: thereafter Francis would not rest until he had compassed the thing. Sudden division and high words would follow, with speechlessness on the mother's part in the rear, which might last for days. Becoming all at once tired of it, she would one morning appear at breakfast looking as if nothing had ever come between them, and they would be the best of friends for a few days, or perhaps a week, seldom longer. Some fresh discord, nowise different in character from the preceding, would arise between

them, and the same weary round be tramped again, each always in the right, and the other in the wrong. Every time they made it up, their relation seemed unimpaired, but it was hardly possible things should go on thus and not at length quite estrange their hearts.

In matters of display, to which Francis had much tendency, his mother's own vanity led her to indulge and spoil him, for, being hers, she was always pleased he should look his best. On his real self she neither had nor sought any influence. Insubordination or arrogance in him, her dignity unslighted, actually pleased her: she liked him to show his spirit: was it not a mark of his breeding?

She was a tall and rather stout woman, with a pretty, small-featured, regular face, and a thin nose with the nostrils pinched.

Castle Weelset was not much of a castle: to an ancient round tower, discomfortably habitable, had been added in the last century a rather large, defensible house. It stood on the edge of a gorge, crowning one of its stony hills of no great height. With scarce a tree to shelter it, the situation was very cold in winter, and it required a hardy breeding to live there in comfort. There was little of a garden, and the stables were somewhat ruinous. For the former fact the climate almost sufficiently accounted, and for the latter a long period of comparative poverty.

The young laird did not like farming, and had no love for books: in this interval between school and college, he found very little to occupy him, and not much to amuse him. Had Kirsty been as encouraging as he had expected, he would on his return have made use of his new pony almost only to ride to

Corbyknowe in the morning and back to the castle at night.

His mother knew old Barclay, as she called him, well enough—that is, not at all, and had never shown him any cordiality, anything indeed better than condescension. To treat him like a gentleman, even when he sat at her own table, she would have counted absurd. He had never been to the castle since the day after her husband's funeral, when she treated him with such emphasized superiority that he felt he could not go again without running the risk either of having his influence with the boy ruined, or giving occasion to a nature not without generosity to take part against his mother. Thenceforward, therefore, he was content with giving him an invariable welcome to his farm, and doing what he could to make his visits pleasant. Chiefly, on such not infrequent occasions, the boy delighted in drawing from his father's friend what tales about his father, and adventures of their campaigns together, he had to tell; and in this way David's wife and children heard many things about himself which would not otherwise have reached them. Naturally Kirsty and Francie grew to be good friends; and after they went to the parish school, there were few days indeed on which they did not walk as far homeward together as the midway divergence of their roads would permit. It is not wonderful, therefore, that at length Francie should be, or should fancy himself in love with Kirsty. But I believe all the time he thought of marrying her as a heroic deed, in raising the girl his mother despised to share the lofty position he and his foolish mother imagined him to occupy. The anticipation of op-

position from his mother naturally strengthened his determination; of opposition on the part of Kirsty he had not dreamed. He took it as of course that, the moment he stated his intention, Kirsty would be charmed, her mother more than pleased, and the stern old soldier overwhelmed with the honor of alliance with the son of his colonel. I do not doubt, however, that he had an affection for Kirsty far deeper and better than his notion of their relations to each other would indicate. Although it was mainly his pride that suffered in his humiliating dismissal, he had, I am sure, a genuine heartache as he galloped home. When he reached the castle, he left his pony to go where he would, and rushed to his room. There, locking the door that his mother might not enter, he threw himself on his bed in the luxurious consciousness of a much-wronged lover. An uneducated country girl, for so he regarded her, had cast from her, not without insult, his splendidly generous offer of himself!

Poor King Cophetua did not, however, shed many tears for the loss of his recusant beggar-maid. By and by he forgot everything, found he had gone to sleep, and, endeavoring to weep again, did not succeed.

He grew hungry soon, and went down to see what was to be had. It was long past the usual hour for dinner, but Mrs. Gordon had not seen him return, and had had it put back; and here was an opportunity of quarrel not to be neglected by a conscientious mother! She lost it, however.

"Gracious, you've been crying!" she exclaimed, the moment she saw him.

Now certainly Francis had not cried much; his eyes were, notwithstanding, a little red.

He had not yet learned to lie, but he might then have made his first essay had he had a fib at his tongue's end; as he had not, he gloomed deeper, and made no answer.

"You've been fighting!" said his mother.

"I haena," he returned with rude indignation. "Gien I had been, div ye think I wud hae grutten?"

"You forget yourself, laird!" remarked Mrs. Gordon, more annoyed with his Scotch than the tone of it. "I would have you remember I am mistress of the house!"

"Till I marry, mother!" rejoined her son.

"Oblige me in the mean time," she rejoined, "by leaving vulgar language outside the walls of it."

Francis was silent; and his mother, content with her victory, and in her own untruthfulness of nature believing he had indeed been fighting and had had the worst of it, said no more, but began to pity and pet him. A pot of his favorite jam presently consoled the love-wounded hero—in the acceptance of which consolation he showed himself far less unworthy than many a grown man similarly circumstanced in the choice of his.

CHAPTER X

DAVID AND FRANCIS

ONE day there was a market at a town some eight or nine miles off, and thither, for lack of anything else to do, Francis had gone to display himself and his pony, which he was riding with so tight a curb that the poor thing every now and then reared in protest against the agony he suffered.

On one of these occasions Don was on the point of falling backward, when a brown wrinkled hand laid hold of him by the head, half-pulling the reins from his rider's hand, and ere he had quite settled again on his forelegs, had unhooked the chain of his curb, and fastened it some three links looser. Francis was more than indignant, even when he saw that the hand was Mr. Barclay's: was he to be treated as one who did not know what he was about!

"Hoots, my man!" said David gently, "there's no occasion to put a water-chain upo' the bonny beastie: he has a mou like a leddy's! and to hae 't linkit up sae ticht is naething less nor tortur til 'im!—It's a won'er to me he hasna brocken your banes and his ain back thegither, puir thing!" he added, patting and stroking the spirited little creature that stood sweating and trembling.

"I thank you, Mr. Barclay," said Francis insolently, "but I am quite able to manage the brute myself. You seem to take me for a fool!"

"'Deed, he's no far aff ane 'at cud ca' a bonny cratur like that a brute!" returned David, nowise pleased to discover such hardness in one whom he would gladly treat like a child of his own. It was a great disappointment to him to see the lad getting farther away from the possibility of being helped by him. "What 'ud yer father say to see ye illuse ony helpless bein! Yer father was awfu guid til's horse-fowk."

The last word was one of David's own: he was a great lover of animals.

"I'll do with my own as I please!" cried Francis, and spurred the pony to pass David. But one stalwart hand held the pony fast, while the other seized his rider by the ankle. The old man was now thoroughly angry with the graceless youth.

"God bless my sowl!" he cried, "hae ye the spurs on as weel? Stick ane o' them intil him again, and I'll cast ye frae the seddle. I' the thick o' a fecht, the lang blades playin aboot yer father's heid like lichts i' the north, he never stack spur intil 's chairger needless!"

"I don't see," said Francis, who had begun to cool down a little, "how he could have enjoyed the fight much if he never forgot himself! I should forget everything in the joy of the battle!"

"Yer father, laddie, never forgot onything *but* himsel. Forgettin himsel left him free to min' a'thing forbye. *Ye* wud forget ilka thing but yer ain rage! Yer father was a great man as weel's a great soger, Francie, and a deevil to fecht, as his men said. I hae mysel seen by the set mou 'at the teeth war clinched i' the inside o' 't, whan a' the time on the

broo o' 'im sat never a runkle. Gien ever there was a man 'at cud think o' twa things at ance, your father cud think o' three; and thae three war God, his enemy, and the beast aneath him. Francie, Francie, i' the nam o' yer father I beg ye to regaird the richts o' the neebour ye sit upo'. Gien ye dinna that, ye'll come or lang to think little o' yer human neebour as weel, carin only for what ye get oot o' 'im!"

A voice inside Francis took part with the old man, and made him yet angrier. Also his pride was the worse annoyed that David Barclay, his tenant, should, in the hearing of two or three loafers gathered behind him, of whose presence the old man was unaware, not only rebuke him, but address him by his name, and the diminutive of it. So when David, in the appeal that burst from his enthusiastic remembrance of his officer in the battle-field, let the pony's head go, Francis dug his spurs in his sides, and darted off like an arrow. The old man for a moment stared open-mouthed after him. The fools around laughed: he turned and walked away, his head sunk on his breast.

Francis had not ridden far before he was vexed with himself. He was not so much sorry, as annoyed that he had behaved in fashion undignified. The thought that his childish behavior would justify Kirsty in her opinion of him, added its sting. He tried to console himself with the reflection that the sort of thing ought to be put an end to at once: how far, otherwise, might not the old fellow's interference go! I am afraid he even said to himself that such was a consequence of familiarity with inferiors.

Yet angry as he was at his fault-finding, he would have been proud of any approval from the lips of the old soldier. He rode his pony mercilessly for a mile or so, then pulled up, and began to talk pettingly to him, which I doubt if the little creature found consoling, for love only makes petting worth anything, and the love here was not much to the front.

About half-way home, he had to ford a small stream, or go round two miles by a bridge. There had been much rain in the night, and the stream was considerably swollen. As he approached the ford, he met a knife-grinder, who warned him not to attempt it: he had nearly lost his wheel in it, he said. But Francis always found it hard to accept advice. His mother had so often predicted from neglect of hers evils which never followed, that he had come to think counsel the one thing not to be heeded.

"Thank you," he said; "I think we can manage it!" and rode on.

When he reached the ford, where of all places the pony's head ought to have been free, he foolishly bethought himself of the curb-chain, and dismounting took it up a couple of links.

But when he remounted, whether from dread of the rush of the brown water, or resentment at the threat of renewed torture, the pony would not take the ford, and a battle royal arose between them, in which Francis was so far victorious that, after many attempts to run away, little Don, rendered desperate by the spur, dashed wildly into the stream. He went plunging along for two or three yards and fell, whereupon Francis found himself rolling in the water, swept along by the current.

A little way lower down, at a sharp turn of the stream under a high bank, was a deep pool, a place held much in dread by the country lads and lassies, being a haunt of the kelpie. Francis knew the spot well, and had good reason to fear that, carried into it, he must be drowned, for he could not swim. Struggling yet harder at the thought of it, he succeeded in recovering his footing, and managed to get out, but lay on the bank for a while exhausted. When at length he came to himself and rose, he found the water still between him and home, and nothing of his pony to be seen. If the youth's good sense had been equal to his courage, he would have been a fine fellow. He dashed straight into the ford, floundered through it, and lost his footing no more than had Don, treated properly. When he reached the high ground on the other side, he could still see nothing of him, and with sad heart concluded him carried into the Kelpie's Hole, and never more to be seen: what would his mother and Mr. Barclay say! Shivering and wretched, and with a growing compunction in regard to his behavior to Don, he crawled wearily home.

Don, however, had at no moment been much in danger. Rid of his master he could take very good care of himself. He got to the bank without difficulty, and took care it should be on the home-side of the stream. Not once looking behind him after his tyrant, he set off at a good round trot, much refreshed by his bath, and making for his loose box at Castle Weelset.

In a narrow part of the road, however, he overtook a cart of Mr. Barclay's; and attempting to pass be-

tween it and the high bank, the man on the shaft caught at his bridle, made him prisoner, tied him to the cart behind, and took him to Corbyknowe. When David came home and saw him, he conjectured pretty nearly what had happened, and tired as he was set out for the castle. Had he not feared that Francis might have been injured, he would not haye cared to go, much as he knew it must relieve him to learn that his pony was safe.

Mrs. Gordon declined to see David, but he ascertained from the servants that Francis had come home half-drowned, leaving Don in the Kelpie's Hole.

David hesitated a little whether or not to punish him for his behavior to the pony by allowing him to remain in ignorance of his safety, and so leaving him to the *agen-bite* of conscience; but concluding that such was not his part, he told them that the animal was safe at Corbyknowe, and went home again.

But he wanted Francis to fetch the pony himself, therefore did not send him, and in the mean time fed and groomed him with his own hands as if he had been his friend's charger. Francis having just enough of the grace of shame to make him shrink from going to Corbyknowe, his mother wrote to David, asking why he did not send home the animal. David, one of the most courteous of men, would take no order from any but his superior officer, and answered that he would gladly give him up to the young laird in person.

The next day Mrs. Gordon drove, in what state she could muster, to Corbyknowe. Arrived there, she declined to leave her carriage, requesting Mrs.

Barclay, who came to the door, to send her husband to her. Mrs. Barclay thought it better to comply.

David came in his shirt-sleeves, for he had been fetched from his work.

"If I understand your answer to my request, Mr. Barclay, you decline to send back Mr. Gordon's pony! Pray, on what grounds?"

"I wrote, ma'am, that I should be glad to give him over to Mr. Francis himself."

"Mr. Gordon does not find it convenient to come all this way on foot. In fact he declines to do it, and requests that you will send the pony home this afternoon."

"Excuse me, mem, but it's surely enough done that a man make known the presence o' strays, and tak proper care o' them until they're claimt! I was fain forbye to gie the bonny thing a bit pleesur in life: Francie's ower hard upon him."

"You forget, David Barclay, that Mr. Gordon is your landlord!"

"His father, mem, was my landlord, and his father's father was my father's landlord; and the interests o' the landlord hae aye been oors. Ither nor Francie's herty frien' I can never be!"

"You presume on my late husband's kindness to you, Barclay!"

"Gien devotion be presumption, mem, I presume. Archibald Gordon was and is my frien', and will be for ever. We hae been throuw ower muckle thegither to change to ane anither. It was for his sake and the laddie's ain that I wantit him to come to me. I wantit a word wi' him aboot that powny o' his. He'll never be true man 'at taks no tent o' dumb animals!

You 'at's sae weel at hame i' the seddle yersel, mem, micht tak a kin'ly care o' what's aneth his!"

"I will have no one interfere with my son. I am quite capable of teaching him his duty myself."

"His father requestit me to do what I could for him, mem!"

"His *late* father, if you please, Barclay!"

"He s'never be Francie's *late* father to Francie, gien I can help it, mem! He may be your *late* husband, mem, but he's my cornel yet, and I s' keep my word till him! It'll no be lang noo, i' the natur o' things, till I gang til him; and sure am I his first word 'ill be aboot the laddie: I wud ill like to answer him, 'Archie, I ken naething aboot him but what I cud weel wuss itherwise!' Hoo wud ye like to gie sic an answer yersel, mem?"

"I'm surprised at a man of your sense, Barclay, thinking we shall know one another in heaven! We shall have to be content with God there!"

"I said naething about h'aven, mem! Fowk may ken ane anither and no be in ae place. I took note i' the kirk last Sunday 'at Abrahaam kent the rich man, and the rich man him, and they warna i' the same place.—But ye'll lat the yoong laird come and see me, mem?" concluded David, changing his tone and speaking as one who begged a favor; for the thought of meeting his old friend and having nothing to tell him about his boy, quenched his pride.

"Home, Thomas!" cried her late husband's wife to her coachman, and drove away.

"Dod! they'll hae to gie that wife a hell til hersel!" said David, turning to the door discomfited.

"And maybe she'll no like it whan she hes't!" re-

turned his wife, who had heard every word. "There's fowk 'at's no fit company for onybody; and I'm thinkin she's ane gien there bena anither!"

"I'll sen' Jemie hame wi' the powny the nicht," said David. "A body canna insist whaur fowk are no frien's. That would grow to enmity, and the en' o' a' guid. Na, we maun sen' hame the powny; and gien there be ony grace i' the bairn, he canna but come and say thank ye!"

Mrs. Gordon rejoiced in her victory; but David's yielding showed itself the true policy. Francis did call and thank him for taking care of Don. He even granted that perhaps he had been too hard on the pony.

"Ye cud richteously expeck naething o' a powny o' his size that that powny o' yours cudna du, Francie!" said David. "But, in God's name, dear laddie, be a richteous man. Gien ye requere no more than's fair frae man or beast, ye'll maistly aye get it. But gien yer ootluik in life be to get a'thing and gie naething, ye maun come to grief ae w'y and a' w'ys. Success in an ill attemp is the warst failyie a man can mak."

But it was talking to the wind, for Francis thought, or tried to think David only bent, like his mother, on finding fault with him. He made haste to get away, and left his friend with a sad heart.

He rode on to the foot of the Horn, to the spot where Kirsty was usually at that season to be found; but she saw him coming, and went up the hill. Soon after, his mother contrived that he should pay a visit to some relatives in the south, and for a time neither the castle nor the Horn saw anything of him. With-

out returning home he went in the winter to Edinburgh, where he neither disgraced nor distinguished himself. David was glad to hear no ill of him. To be beyond his mother's immediate influence was perhaps to his advantage, but as nothing superior was substituted, it was at best but little gain. His companions were like himself, such as might turn to worse or better, no one could tell which.

CHAPTER XI

KIRSTY AND PHEMY

DURING the first winter Francis spent at college, his mother was in England, and remained there all the next summer and winter. When at last she came home, she was even less pleasant than before in the eyes of her household, no one of which had ever loved her. Throughout the summer she had a succession of visitors, and stories began to spread concerning strange doings at the castle. The neighbors talked of extravagance, and the censorious among them of riotous living; while some of the servants more than hinted that the amount of wine and whiskey consumed was far in excess of what served when the old colonel was alive.

One of them who, in her mistress' frequent fits of laziness, acted as housekeeper, had known David Barclay from his boyhood, and understood his real intimacy with her late master: it was not surprising, therefore, that she should open her mind to him, while keeping toward every one else a settled silence concerning her mistress' affairs: none of the stories current in the country-side came from her. But David was to Mrs. Bremner the other side of a deep pit, into the bottom of which whatever was said between them dropped.

"There'll come a catastroff or lang," said Mrs.

Bremner, one evening when David Barclay had overtaken her on the road to the town, "and that'll be seen! The property's jist awa to the dogs! There's Maister Donal, the factor, gaein aboot like ane in a dilemm as to cuttin 's thro't or blawin his harns oot! He daursna say a word, ye see! The auld laird trustit him, and he's feart 'at he be blamit, but there's nae duin onything wi' that wuman: the siller maun be forthcomin whan she's wantin 't!"

"The siller's no hers ony mair nor the lan'; a's the yoong laird's!" remarked David.

"That's true; but she's i' the pooer o' 't till he come o' age: and Maister Donal, puir man, mony's the time he's jist driven to ane mair to get what's aye wantit and wantit. What comes o' the siller it jist blecks me to think: there's no a thing aboot the hoose to shaw for't! And hearken, Dawvid, but latna baith lugs hear 't, for dreid the tane come ower 't again to the tither—I'm doobtin the drink's gettin a sair grup o' her!"

"'Deed I wudna be nane surprised!" returned David. "Whatever micht want in at her door, there's naething inside to haud it oot. Eh, to think o' Archie Gordon takin til himsel sic a wife! that a man like him, o' guid report, and come to years o' discretion—to think o' brains like his turnin as fozy as an auld neep at sicht o' a bonny front til an ae wa' hoose (*a house of but one wall*)! It canna be 'at witchcraft's clean dune awa wi'!"

"Bonny, Dawvid!—Ca'd ye the mistress bonny?"

"She used to be—bonny, that is, as a button or a buckle micht be bonny. What she may be the noo, I dinna ken; for I haena set ee upon her sin' she

cam to the Knowe orderin me to sen' back Francie's powny: she was suppercilly eneuch than for twa cornels and a corporal, but no ill luikin. Gien she hae a spot o' beaouty left, the drink 'll tak it or it hae dune wi' her!"

"Or she hae dune wi' hit, Dawvid! It's ta'en ae color frae her a'ready, and begud to gie her anither! But it concerns me mair aboot Francie nor my lady: what's to come o' him when a's gane? what'll there be for him to come intil?"

Gladly would David have interfered, but he was helpless; he had no legal guardianship over or for the boy! Nothing could be done till he was a man! —"if ever he be a man!" said David to himself with a sigh, and the thought how much better off he was with his half-witted Steenie than his friend with his clever Francie.

Mrs. Bremner was sister-in-law to the schoolmaster, and was then on her way to see him and his daughter Phemy. From childhood the girl had been in the way of going to the castle to see her aunt, and so was well known about the place. Being an engaging child, she had become not only welcome to the servants but something of a favorite with the mistress, whom she amused with her little airs, and pleased with her winning manners. She was now about fourteen, a half-blown beauty of the red and white, gold and blue kind. She had long been a vain little thing, approving of her own looks in the glass, and taking much interest in setting them off, but so simple as to make no attempt at concealing her self-satisfaction. Her pleased contemplation of this or that portion of her person, and the frantic attempts

she was sometimes espied making to get a sight of her back, especially when she wore a new frock, were indeed more amusing than hopeful, but her vanity was not yet so pronounced as to overshadow her better qualities, and Kirsty had not thought it well to take notice of it, although, being more than any one else a mother to her, she was already a little anxious on the score of it, and the rather that her aunt, like her father, neither saw nor imagined fault in her.

That the child had no mother, drew to her the heart of the girl whose mother was her strength and joy; while gratitude to the child's father, who, in opening for her some doors of wisdom and more of knowledge, had put her under eternal obligations, moved her to make what return she could. It deepened her sense of debt to Phemy that the schoolmaster did not do for his daughter anything like what he had years long been doing for his pupil, whence she almost felt as if she had diverted to her own use much that rightly belonged to Phemy. At the same time she knew very well that had she never existed the relation between the father and the daughter would have been the same. The child of his dearly loved wife, the schoolmaster was utterly content with his Phemy; for he felt as if she knew everything her mother knew, had the same inward laws of being, and the same disposition, and was simply, like her, perfect.

That she should ever do anything wrong was an idea inconceivable to him. Nor was there much chance of his discovering it if she did. When not at work, he was constantly reading. Most people close

a book without having gained from it a single germ of thought; Mr. Craig seldom opened one without falling directly into a brown study over something suggested by it. But I believe, that, even when thus absorbed, Phemy was never far from his thought. At the same time, like many Scots, while she was his one joy, he seldom showed her sign of affection, seldom made her feel, and never sought to make her feel how he loved her. His love was taken by him for understood by her, and was to her almost as if it did not exist.

That his child required to be taught had scarcely occurred to the man who could not have lived without learning, or enjoyed life without teaching—as witness the eagerness with which he would help Kirsty along any path of knowledge in which he knew how to walk. The love of knowledge had grown in him to a possessing passion, paralyzing in a measure those powers of his life sacred to life—that is, to God and his neighbor.

Kirsty could not do nearly what she would to make up for his neglect. For one thing, the child did not take to learning, and though she loved Kirsty and often tried to please her, would not keep on doing anything without being more frequently reminded of her duty than the distance between their two abodes permitted. Kirsty had her to the farm as often as the schoolmaster would consent to her absence, and kept her as long as he went on forgetting it; while Phemy was always glad to go to Corbyknowe, and always glad to get away again. For Mrs. Barclay thought it her part to teach her household matters, and lessons of that sort Phemy relished worse than

some of a more intellectual nature. If left with her, the moment Kirsty appeared again the child would fling from her whatever might be in her hand, and flee as to her deliverer from bondage and hard labor. Then would Kirsty always insist on her finishing what she had been at, and Phemy would obey, with the protest of silent tears, and the airs of a much-injured mortal. Had Kirsty been backed by the child's father, she might have made something of her; but it grew more and more painful to think of her future, when her self-constituted guardian should have lost what influence she had over her.

Phemy was rather afraid of Steenie. Her sunny nature shrank from the shadow, as of a wall, in which Steenie appeared to her always to stand. From any little attention he would offer her, she, although never rude to him, would involuntarily recoil, and he soon learned to leave her undismayed. That the child's repugnance troubled him, though he never spoke of it, Kirsty saw quite plainly, for she could read his face like a book, and heard him sigh when even his mother did not. Her eyes were constantly regarding him, feeding like sheep on the pasture of his face:—I think I have used a figure of sir Philip Sidney's. But say rather—the thoughts that strayed over his face were the sheep to which all her life she had been the devoted shepherdess.

At Corbyknowe things went on as hitherto. Kirsty was in no danger of tiring of the even flow of her life. Steenie's unselfish solitude of soul made him every day dearer to her. Books she sought in every accessible, and found occasionally in an unhopeful quarter. She had no thought of distinguishing her-

self, no smallest ambition of becoming learned; her soul was athirst to understand, and what she understood found its way from her mind into her life. Much to the advantage of her thinking were her keen power and constant practice of observation. I utterly refuse the notion that we cannot think without words, but certainly the more forms we have ready to embody our thoughts, the farther we shall be able to carry our thinking. Richly endowed, Kirsty required the more mental food, and was the more able to use it when she found it. To such of the neighbors as had no knowledge of any diligence save that of the hands, she seemed to lead an idle life; but indeed even Kirsty's hands were far from idle. When not with Steenie she was almost always at her mother's call, who from the fear that she might grow up incapable of managing a house, often required a good deal of her. But the mother did not fail to note with what alacrity she would lay her book aside, sometimes even dropping it in her eagerness to answer her summons. Dismissed for the moment, she would at once take her book again and the seat nearest to it: she could read anywhere, and gave herself none of the student-airs that make some young people so pitifully unpleasant. At the same time solitude was preferable for study, and Kirsty was always glad to find herself with her books in the little hut, Steenie asleep on the heather carpet on her feet, and the assurance that there no one would interrupt her.

It was not wonderful that, in the sweet absence of selfish cares, her mind full of worthy thoughts, and her heart going out in tenderness, her face should go

on growing in beauty and refinement. She was not yet arrived at physical full growth, and the forms of her person being therefore in a process of change were the more easily modelled after her spiritual nature. She seemed almost already one that would not die, but live forever, and continue to inherit the earth. Neither her father nor her mother could have imagined anything better to be made of her.

Steenie had not changed his habits, neither seemed to grow at all more like other people, but he was now less frequently unhappy, and seldom so much depressed. But he showed no sign of less dependence on Kirsty.

CHAPTER XII

THE EARTH-HOUSE

ABOUT a year after Francis Gordon went to Edinburgh, Kirsty and Steenie made a discovery.

Between Corbyknowe and the Horn, on whose sides David Barclay had a right of pasturage for the few sheep to which Steenie and Snootie were the shepherds, was a small glen, through which, on its way to join the little river with the kelpie-pot, ran a brook, along whose banks lay two narrow breadths of nice grass. The brother and sister always crossed this brook when they wanted to go straight to the top of the hill.

One morning, having each taken the necessary run and jump, they had begun to climb on the other side, when Kirsty, who was a few paces before him, turned at an exclamation from Steenie.

"It's a' the weicht o' my muckle feet!" he cried, as he dragged one of the troublesome members out of a hole. "Losh, I dinna ken hoo far it michtna hae gane doon gien I hadna gotten a haud o' 't in time and pu'd it oot!"

How much of humor, how much of silliness, and how much of truth were wrapped up together in some of the things he said, it was impossible to determine. I believe Kirsty came pretty near knowing, but even she was not always sure where wilful

oddity and where misapprehension was at the root of a remark.

"Gien ye set yer fit upon a hole," said Kirsty, "what can the puir thing du but gang doon intil't? Ye maunna be oonrizzonable wi' the craturs, Steenie! Ye maun be fair til them."

"But there was nae hole!" returned Steenie. "There cudna hae been. There's the hole noo! My fit made it, and there it'll hae to bide! It's a some fearsome thing, divna ye think, 'at what aiven the fit o' a body dis, bides? What for disna the hole gang awa whan the fit lifts? Luik ye there! Ye see thae twa stanes stan'in up by themsels, and there's the hole—atween the twa! There cudna hae been a hole there afore the weicht o' my fit cam doon upo' the spot and ca'd it throuw! I gaed in maist til my knee!"

"Lat's luik!" said Kirsty, and proceeded to examine the place.

She thought at first it must be the burrow of some animal, but the similarity in shape of the projecting stones suggesting that their position might not be fortuitous, she would look a little farther, and began to pull away the heather about the mouth of the opening. Steenie set himself with might and main to help her. Kirsty was much the stronger of the two, but Steenie always did his best to second her in anything that required exertion.

They soon spied the lump of sod and heather which Steenie's heavy foot had driven down, and when they had pulled that out, they saw that the hole went deeper still, seeming a very large burrow indeed—therefore a little fearsome. Having widened the

mouth of it by clearing away a thick growth of roots from its sides, and taken out a quantity of soft earth, they perceived that it went sloping into the ground still farther. With growing curiosity they leaned down into it lying on the edge, and reaching with their hands removed the loose earth as low as they could. This done, the descent showed itself about two feet square, as far down as they had cleared it, beyond which a little way it was lost in the dark.

What were they to do next? There was yet greater inducement to go on, but considerations came which were not a little deterrent. Although Steenie had worked well, Kirsty knew he had a horror of dark places, associating them somehow with the weight of his feet. Whether such places had for him any suggestion of the grave, I cannot tell: certainly to get rid of his feet was the form his idea of the salvation he needed was readiest to take. Then might there not be some animal inside? Steenie thought not, for there was no opening until he made it; and Kirsty also thought not, on the ground that she knew no wild animal larger than fox or badger, neither of which would have made such a big hole. One moment, however, her imagination was nearly too much for her: what if some huge bear had been asleep in it for hundreds of years, and growing all the time! Certainly he could not get out, but if she roused him, and he got a hold of her! The next instant her courage revived, for she would have been ashamed to let what she did not believe influence any action. The passage must lead somewhere, and it was large enough for her to explore it!

Because of her dress, she must creep in head fore-

most—in which lay the advantage that so she would meet any danger face to face. Telling Steenie that if he heard her cry out, he must get hold of her feet and pull, she laid herself on the ground and crawled in. She thought it must lead to an ancient tomb, but said nothing of the conjecture for fear of horrifying Steenie, who stood trembling, sustained only by his faith in Kirsty.

She went down and down and quite disappeared. Not a foot was left for Steenie to lay hold of. Terrible and long seemed the time to him as he stood there forsaken, his darling out of sight in the heart of the earth. He knew there were wolves in Scotland once: who could tell but a she-wolf had been left, and a whole clan of them lived there underground, never issuing in the daytime: there might be the open mouth of a passage, under a rock and curtained with heather, in some other spot of the hill! What if one of them got Kirsty by the throat before she had time to cry out! Then he thought she might have gone till she could go no farther, and not having room to turn, was trying to creep backward, but her clothes hindered her. Forgetting his repugnance in overmastering fear, the faithful fellow was already half inside the hole to go after her, when up shot the head of Kirsty, almost in his face. For a moment he was terribly perplexed: he had been expecting to come on her feet, not her head: how could she have gone in head foremost, and not come back feet foremost?

"Eh, wuman," he said in a fear-struck whisper, "it's awfu to see ye come oot o' the yird like a muckle worm!"

"Ye saw me gang in, Steenie, ye gowk!" returned Kirsty, dismayed herself at sight of his solemn dread.

"Ay," answered Steenie, "but I didna see ye come oot! Eh, Kirsty, wuman, hae ye a heid at baith en's o' ye?"

Kirsty's laughter blew Steenie's discomposure away, and he too laughed.

"Come back hame," said Kirsty; "I maun get haud o' a can'le! Yon's a place maun be seen intil. I never saw, or raither faun' (*felt*) the like o' 't, for o' seein there's nane, or next to nane. There's room eneuch; ye can see that wi' yer airms!"

"What is there room eneuch for?" asked Steenie.

"For you and me, and twenty or thirty mair, mebbe —I dinna ken," replied Kirsty.

"I s' mak ye a present o' my room intil't," returned Steenie. "I want nane o' 't."

"I'll gang doon wi' the can'le," said Kirsty, "and see whether 't be a place for ye. Gien I cry oot, 'Ay is't,' wull ye come?"

"That I wull, gien 't war the whaul's belly!" replied Steenie.

They set off for the house, and as they walked they talked.

"I div won'er what the place cud ever hae been for!" said Kirsty, more to herself than Steenie. "It's bigger nor ony thoucht I had o' 't."

"What is't like, Kirsty?" inquired Steenie.

"Hoo can I tell whan I saw naething!" replied Kirsty. "But," she added thoughtfully, "gien it warna that we're in Scotlan', and they're nighhan' Rom', I wud hae been 'maist sure I had won intil ane o' the catacombs!"

"Eh, losh, lat me awa to the hill!" cried Steenie, stopping and half turning. "I canna bide the verra word o' the craturs!"

"What word than?" asked Kirsty, a little surprised; for how did Steenie know anything about the catacombs?

"To think," he went on, "o' a haill kirk o' cats aneath the yird—a' sittin kaimin themsels wi' kaims! —Kirsty, ye *winna* think it a place for *me?* Ye see I'm no like ither fowk, and sic a thing micht ca (*drive*) me oot o' a' the sma' wits ever I had!"

"Hoots!" rejoined Kirsty, with a smile, "the catacombs has naething to du wi cats or kaims!"

"Tell me what are they, than."

"The catacombs," answered Kirsty, "was what in auld times, and no i' this Cueentry ava, they ca'd the places whaur they laid their deid."

"Eh, Kirsty, but that's waur!" returned Steenie. "I wudna gang intil sic a place wi' feet siclike's my ain—na, no for what the warl cud gie me!—no for lang Lowrie's fiddle and a' the tunes intil't! I wud never get my feet oot o' 't! They'd haud me there!"

Then Kirsty began to tell him, as she would have taught a child, something of the history of the catacombs, knowing how it must interest him.

"I' the days langsyne," she said, "there was fowk, like you and me, unco fain o' the bonny man. The verra soun o' the name o' 'im was eneuch to gar their herts loup wi' doonricht glaidness. And they gaed here and there and a' gait, and tellt ilka body aboot him; and fowk 'at didna ken him, and dinna want to ken him, couldna bide to hear tell o' him,

and they said, 'Lat's hae nae mair o' this! Hae dune wi yer bonny man! Haud yer tongues,' they cryit. But the ithers, they wadna hear o' haudin their tongues. A'body maun ken aboot him! 'Sae lang's we *hae* tongues, and can wag them to the name o' him!' they said, 'we'll no haud them.' And at that they fell upo' them, and ill-used them sair; some o' them they tuik and burnt alive—that is, brunt them deid; and some o' them they flang to the wild beasts, and they bitit them and tore them to bits. And——"

"Was the bitin o' the beasts terrible sair?" interrupted Steenie.

"Ay, I reckon it was some sair; but the puir fowk aye said the bonny man was wi' them, and lat them bite!—they didna care!"

"Ay, of coorse, gien he was wi' them, they wadna min' 't a hair, or at least, no twa hairs! Wha wud! Gien he be in yon hole, Kirsty, I'll gang back and intil't my lee lane. I wull noo!"

Steenie turned and had run some distance before Kirsty succeeded in stopping him. She did not run after him.

"Steenie! Steenie!" she cried, "I dinna doobt he's there, for he's a'gait; but ye ken yersel ye canna aye see him, and maybe ye wudna see him there the noo, and micht think he wasna there, and turn fleyt. Bide till we hae a licht, and I gang doon first."

Steenie was persuaded, and turned and came back to her. To father, mother, and sister he was always obedient, even on the rare occasions when it cost him much to be so.

"Ye see, Steenie," she continued, "yon's no the place! I dinna ken yet what place yon is. I was

only gaein to tell ye aboot the places it min't me o'! Wud ye like to hear aboot them?"

"I wad that, richt weel! Say awa, Kirsty."

"The fowk, than, ye see, 'at lo'ed the bonny man, gethert themsels aye thegither to hae cracks and newses wi' ane anither aboot him; and, as I was tellin ye, the fowk that didna care aboot him war that angert 'at they set upo them, and jist wud hae nane o' them nor him. Sae to haud oot o' their grip, they coonselled thegither, and concludit to gether in a place whaur naebody wud think o' luikin for them —whaur but i' the booels o' the earth, whaur they laid their deid awa upo' skelfs, like in an aumry!"

"Eh, but that was fearsome!" interposed Steenie. "They maun hae been sair set!—Gien I had been there, wud they hae garred me gang wi' them?"

"Na, no gien ye didna like. But ye wud hae likit weel to gang. It wasna an ill w'y to beery fowk, nor an ill place to gang til, for they aye biggit up the skelf, ye ken. It was howkit oot—whether oot o' hard earth or saft stane, I dinna ken, I reckon it wud be some no sae hard kin' o' a rock—and whan the deid was laid intil't, they biggit up the mou o' the place, that is, frae that same skelf to the ane 'at was abune 't, and sae a' was weel closed in."

"But what for didna they beery their deid mensefulike i' their kirkyairds?"

"'Cause theirs was a great muckle toon, wi sic a heap o' hooses that there wasna room for kirkyards; sae they tuik them ootside the toon, and gaed aneth wi' them a'thegither. For there they howkit a lot o' passages like trances, and here and there a wee roomy like, wi' ither trances gaein frae them this

gait and that. Sae, whan they tuik themsels there, the friens o' the bonny man wud fill ane o' the roomies, and stan' awa in ilk ane o' the passages 'at gaed frae 't; and that w'y, though there cudna mony o' them see ane anither at ance, a gey lottie wud hear, some a', and some a hantle o' what was said. For there they cud speyk lood oot, and a body abune hear naething and suspec naething. And jist think, Steenie, there's a pictur o' the bonny man himsel paintit upo the wa' o' ane o' thae places doon aneth the grun'!"

"I reckon it'll be unco like him!"

"Maybe: I canna tell aboot that."

"Gien I cud see 't, I cud tell; but I'm thinkin it'll be some gate gey and far awa?"

"Ay, it's far, far.—It wud tak a body—lat me see —maybe half a year to trevel there upo's ain fit," answered Kirsty, after some meditation.

"And me a hantle langer, my feet's sae odious heavy!" remarked Steenie with a sigh.

As they drew near the house, their mother saw them coming, and went to the door to meet them.

"We're wantin a bit o' a can'le, and a spunk or twa, mother," said Kirsty.

"Ye s' get that," answered Marion. "But what want ye a can'le for i' the braid mids o' the daylicht?"

"We want to gang doon a hole," replied Steenie with flashing eyes, "and see the pictur o' the bonny man."

"Hoot, Steenie! I tellt ye it wasna there," interposed Kirsty.

"Na," returned Steenie: "ye only said yon hole wasna that place. Ye said the bonny man *was* there,

though I michtna see him. Ye didna say the pictur wasna there!"

"The pictur's no there, Steenie.—We've come upon a hole, mother, 'at we want to gang doon intil and see what it's like," said Kirsty.

"The weicht o' my feet brak throu intil't," added Steenie.

"Preserve 's, lassie! tak tent whaur ye cairry the bairn!" cried the mother. "But, eh, tak him whaur ye like," she substituted, correcting herself. "Weel ken I ye'll tak him naegait but whaur it's weel he sud gang! The laddie needs twa mithers, and the Merciful has gien him the twa! Ye're full mair his mither nor me, Kirsty!"

She asked no more questions, but got them the candle and let them go. They hastened back, Steenie in his most jubilant mood, which seemed always to have in it a touch of deathly frost and a flash as of the primal fire. What could be the strange displacement or maladjustment which, in the brain harboring the immortal thing, troubled it so, and made it yearn after an untasted liberty? The source of his jubilance now was easy to tell: the idea of the bonny man was henceforth, in that troubled brain of his, associated with the place into which they were about to descend.

The moment they reached the spot, Kirsty, to the renewed astonishment of Steenie, dived at once into the ground at her feet, and disappeared.

"Kirsty! Kirsty!" he cried out after her, and danced like a terrified child. Then he shook with a fresh dismay at the muffled sound that came back to him in answer from the unseen hollows of the earth.

Already Kirsty stood at the bottom of the sloping tunnel, and was lighting her candle. When it burned up, she found herself looking into a level gallery, the roof of which she could touch. It was not an excavation, but had been trenched from the surface, for it was roofed with great slabs of stone. Its sides, of rough stones, were six or seven feet apart at the floor, which was paved with small boulders, but sloped so much toward each other, that at the top their distance was less by about two and a half feet. Kirsty was, as I have said, a keen observer, and her power of seeing had been greatly developed through her constant conscientious endeavor to realize every description she read.

She went on about ten or twelve yards, and came to a bend in the gallery, succeeded by a sort of chamber, whence branched a second gallery, which soon came to an end. The place was in truth not unlike the catacombs, only its two galleries were built, and much wider than the excavated thousands in the catacombs. She turned back to the entrance, there left her candle alight, and again startled Steenie, still staring into the mouth of the hole, with her sudden reappearance.

"Wud ye like to come doon, Steenie?" she said. "It's a queer place."

"Is 't awfu fearsome?" asked Steenie, shrinking.

His feeling of dismay at the cavernous, the terrene dark, was not inconsistent with his pleasure in being out on the wild waste hill-side, when heaven and earth were absolutely black, not seldom the whole of the night, in utter loneliness to eye or ear, without ever feeling anything like dread. Then and there only

did he seem to have room enough. His terror was of the smallest pressure on his soul, the least hint at imprisonment. That he could not rise and wander about among the stars at his will, shaped itself to him as the heaviness of his feet holding him down. His feet were the loaded gyves that made of the world but a roomy prison. The limitless was essential to his conscious well-being.

"No a bittock," answered Kirsty, who felt awe anywhere—on hill-top, in churchyard, in sunlit silent room—but never fear. "It's as like the place I was tellin ye aboot——"

"Ay, the cat-place!" interrupted Steenie

"The place wi' the pictur," returned Kirsty.

Steenie darted forward, shot head-first into the hole as he had seen Kirsty do, and crept undismayed to the bottom of the slope. Kirsty followed close behind, but he was already on his feet when she joined him. He grasped her arm eagerly, his face turned from her, and his eyes gazing fixedly into the depth of the gallery, lighted so vaguely by the candle on the floor of its entrance.

"I think I saw him!" he said in a whisper full of awe and delight. "I think I did see him!—but, Kirsty, hoo am I to be sure 'at I saw him?"

"Maybe ye did and maybe ye didna see him," replied Kirsty; "but that disna metter sae muckle, for he's aye seein you; and ye'll see him, and be sure 'at ye see him, whan the richt times comes."

"Ye div think that, Kirsty?"

"Ay div I," returned Kirsty, confidently.

"I s' wait," answered Steenie, and in silence followed Kirsty along the gallery.

This was Steenie's first, and all but his last descent into the *earth-house*, or *Picts' house*, or *weem*, as a place of the sort is called: there are many such in the east of Scotland, their age and origin objects of merest conjecture. The moment Steenie was out of it, he fled to the Horn.

The next Sunday he heard read at church the story of the burial and resurrection of the Lord, and, unavoidably after their talk about the catacombs, associated the chamber they had just discovered with the tomb in which "they laid him," at the same time concluding the top of the hill, where he had, as he believed on certain favored nights met the bonny man, the place whence he ascended, to come again as he did! The earth-house had no longer any attraction for Steenie: the bonny man was not there; he was risen! He was somewhere above the mountain-top haunted by Steenie, and Steenie already knew, that he sometimes descended upon it for had he not seen him there!

Happy Steenie! Happier than so many Christians who, more in their brain-senses but far less in their heart-senses than he, haunt the sepulchre as if the dead Jesus lay there still, and forget to walk the world with him who dieth no more, the living one!

But his sister took a great liking to the place, nor was repelled by her mistaken suspicion that there the people of the land, in times unknown, had buried some of their dead. In the hot days, when the earth-house was cool, and in the winter when the thick blanket of the snow lay over it, and it felt warm as she entered it from the frosty wind, she would sit there in the dark, sometimes imagining herself one

of the believers of the old time, thinking the Lord was at hand, coming in person to fetch her and her friends. When the spring came, she carried down sod and turf, and made for herself a seat in the central chamber, there to sit and think. By and by she fastened an oil lamp to the wall, and would light its rush-pith wick, and read by it. Occasionally she made a good peat fire, for she had found a chimney that went sloping into the upper air; and if it did not always draw well, peat-smoke is as pleasant as wholesome, and she could bear a good deal of its smothering. Not unfrequently she carried her book there when no one was likely to want her, and enjoyed to the full the rare and delightful sense of absolute safety from interruption. Sometimes she would make a little song there, with which as she made it its own music would come, and she would model the air with her voice as she wrote the words in a little book on her knee.

CHAPTER XIII

A VISIT FROM FRANCIS GORDON

THE summer following Gordon's first session at college, Castle Weelset and Corbyknowe saw nothing of him. No one missed him much, and but for his father's sake no one would have thought much about him. Kirsty, as one who had told him the truth concerning himself, thought of him oftener than any one except her father.

The summer after, he paid a short visit to Castle Weelset, and went one day to Corbyknowe, where he left a favorable impression upon all, which impression Kirsty had been the readier to receive because of the respect she felt for him as a student. The old imperiousness which made him so unlike his father had retired into the background; his smile, though not so sweet, came oftener; and his carriage was full of courtesy. But something was gone which his old friends would gladly have seen still. His behavior in the old time was not so pleasant, but he had been as one of the family. Often disagreeable, he was yet loving. Now, he laid himself out to make himself acceptable as a superior. Freed so long from his mother's lowering influence what was of his father in him might by this time have come more to the surface but for certain ladies in Edinburgh, connections of the family, who, influenced by his good

looks and pleasant manners, and possibly by his position in the Gordon country, sought his favor by deeds of flattery, and succeeded in spoiling him not a little.

Steenie happening to be about the house when he came, Francis behaved to him so kindly that the gentle creature, overcome with grateful delight, begged him to go and see a house he and Kirsty were building.

In some families the games of the children mainly consist in the construction of dwellings, of this kind or that—castle, or ship, or cave, or nest in the tree-top—according to the material attainable. It is an outcome of the aboriginal necessity for shelter, this instinct of burrowing: Welbeck Abbey is the development of a *weem* or *Pict's house.* Steenie had very early shown it, probably from a vague consciousness of weakness, and Kirsty came heartily to his aid in following it, with the reaction of waking in herself a luxurious idea of sheltered safety. Northern children cherish in their imaginations the sense of protection more, I fancy, than others. This is partly owing to the severity of their climate, the snow and wind, the rain and sleet, the hail and darkness they encounter. I doubt whether an English child can ever have such a sense of protection as a Scots bairn in bed on a winter night, his mother in the nursery, and the wind howling like a pack of wolves about the house.

Francis consented to go with Steenie to see his house, and Kirsty naturally accompanied them. By this time she had gathered the little that was known, and there is very little known yet, concern-

ing *Picts' houses*, and as they went it occurred to her that it would be pleasant to the laird to be shown something on his own property of which he had never heard, and which, in the eyes of many, would add to its value. She took the way, therefore, that led past the weem.

She had so well cleared out its entrance, that it now was comparatively easy of access, else I doubt if the young laird would have risked the spoiling of his admirably fitting clothes to satisfy the mild curiosity he felt regarding Kirsty's discovery. As it was, he pulled off his coat, before entering, despite her assurance that he "needna fear blaudin onything."

She went in before him to light her candle and he followed. As she showed him the curious place, she gave him the results of her reading about such constructions, telling him who had written concerning them, and what they had written. "There's mair o' them, I gether," she said, "and mair remarkable anes, in oor ain coonty nor in ony ither in Scotlan'. I hae mysel seen nane but this." Then she told him how Steenie had led the way to its discovery. By the time she ended, Gordon was really interested—chiefly, no doubt, in finding himself possessor of a thing which many men, learned and unlearned, would think worth coming to see.

"Did you find this in it?" he asked, seating himself on her little throne of turf.

"Na; I put that there mysel," answered Kirsty. "There was naething intil the place, jist naething ava! There was naething ye cud hae picked aff o' the flure. Gien it hadna been oot o' the gait o' the

win', ye wud hae thoucht it had sweepit it clean. Ye cud hae tellt by naething intil't what ever it was meant for, hoose or byre or barn, kirk or kirk-yard. It had been jist a hidy-hole in troubled times, whan the cuintry wud be swarmin wi' stravaguin marauders!"

"What made ye the seat for, Kirsty?" asked Gordon, calling her by her name for the first time, and falling into the mother tongue with a flash of his old manner.

"I come here whiles," she answered, "to be my lane and read a bit. It's sae quaiet. Eternity seems itsel to come and hide in't whiles. I'm tempit whiles to bide a' nicht."

"Isna't awfu cauld?"

"Na, no aften that. It's fine and warm i' the winter. And I can licht a fire whan I like.—But ye haena yer coat on, Francie! I ouchtna to hae latten ye bide sae lang!"

He shivered, rose, and made his way out. Steenie stood in the sunlight waiting for them.

"Why, Steenie," said Gordon, "you brought me to see your house: why didn't you come in with me?"

"Na, na! I'm feart for my feet: this is no *my* hoose!" answered Steenie. "I'm biggin ane. Kirsty's helpin me: I couldna big a hoose wantin' Kirsty! That's what I wud hae ye see, no this ane. This is Kirsty's hoose. It was Kirsty wantit ye to see this ane.—Na, it's no mine," he added reflectively. "I ken I maun come til 't some day, but I s' bide oot o' 't as lang's I can. I like the hill a heap better."

"What *does* he mean?" asked Francis, turning to Kirsty.

"Ow, he has a heap o' notions o' 's ain!" answered Kirsty, who did not care, especially in his presence, to talk about her brother save to those who loved him.

When Francis turned again, he saw Steenie a good way up the hill.

"Where does he want to take me, Kirsty? Is it far?" he asked.

"Ay, it's a gey bitty; it's nearhan' at the tap o' the Horn, a wee ayont it."

"Then I think I shall not go," returned Francis. "I will come another day."

"Steenie! Steenie!" cried Kirsty, "he'll no gang the day. He maun gang hame. He says he'll come anither time. Haud ye awa on to yer hoose; I s' be wi' ye by and by."

Steenie went up the hill, and Kirsty and Francis walked toward Corbyknowe.

"Has no young man appeared yet to put Steenie's nose out of joint, Kirsty?" asked Gordon.

Kirsty thought the question rude, but answered, with quiet dignity, "No ane. I never had muckle opinion o' *young* men, and dinna care aboot their company.—But what are ye thinkin o' duin yersel—I mean, whan ye're throu wi' the college?" she continued. "Ye'll surely be comin hame to tak things intil yer ain han'? My father says whiles he's some feart they're no bein made the maist o'."

"The property must look after itself, Kirsty. I will be a soldier like my father. If it could do with out him when he was in India, it may just as well do

without me. As long as my mother lives, she shall do what she likes with it."

Thus talking, and growing more friendly as they went, they walked slowly back to the house. There Francis mounted his horse and rode away, and for more than two years they saw nothing of him.

CHAPTER XIV

STEENIE'S HOUSE

STEENIE seemed always to experience a strange sort of terror while waiting for any one to come out of the weem, into which he never entered, and it was his repugnance to the place that chiefly moved him to build a house of his own. He may have also calculated on being able, with such a refuge at hand, to be on the hill in all weathers. They still made use of their little hut as before, and Kirsty still kept her library in it, but it was at the root of the Horn, and Steenie loved the peak of it more than any other spot in his narrow world.

I have already said that when, on the occasion of its discovery, Steenie, for the first and the last time, came out of the weem, he fled to the Horn. There he roamed for hours, possessed with the feeling that he had all but lost Kirsty who had taken possession of a house into which he could never accompany her. For himself he would like a house on the very top of the Horn, not one inside it!

Near it was a little scoop out of the hill-side, sheltered on all sides except the south, which, the one time I saw it, reminded me strongly of Dante's *grembo* in the purgatorial hill, where the upward pilgrims had to rest outside the gate, because of the darkness during which no man could go higher.

Here, it is true, were no flowers to weave a pattern upon its carpet of green; true also here were no beautiful angels, in green wings and green garments, poised in the sweet night-air, watchful with their short, pointless, flaming swords against the creeping enemy; but it was, nevertheless, the loveliest carpet of grass and moss, and as to the angels, I find it impossible to imagine, even in the heavenly host, one heart more guardant than that of Kirsty, one truer, or more devoted to its charge. The two were together as the child of earth, his perplexities and terrors ever shot through with flashes of insight and hope, and the fearless, less imaginative, confident angel, appointed to watch and ward and see him safe through the loose-cragged mountain-pass to the sunny vales beyond.

On the northern slope of the hollow, full in the face of the sun, a little family of rocks had fallen together, odd in shapes and positions, but of long stable equilibrium, with narrow spaces between them. The sun was throwing his last red rays among these rocks when Steenie the same evening wandered into the little valley. The moment his eyes fell upon them, he said in his heart, "Yon's the place for a hoose: I'll get Kirsty to big ane, and mebbe she'll come and bide in't wi' me whiles!"

In his mind there were for some years two conflicting ideas of refuge, one embodied in the heathery hut with Kirsty, the other typified by the uplifted loneliness, the air and the space of the mountain upon which the bonny man sometimes descended: for the last three years or more the latter idea had had the upper hand: now it seemed possible to have the two

kinds of refuge together, where the more material would render the more spiritual easier of attainment! Such were not Steenie's words; indeed he used none concerning the matter; but such were his vague thoughts—feelings rather, not yet thoughts.

The spot had indeed many advantages. For one thing, the group of rocks was the ready skeleton of the house Steenie wanted. Again, if the snow sometimes lay deeper there than in other parts of the hill, there first it began to melt. A third advantage was that, while, as I have said, the valley was protected by higher ground everywhere but on the south, it there afforded a large outlook over the boggy basin and over the hills beyond its immediate rim, to a horizon in which stood some of the loftier peaks of the highland mountains.

When Steenie's soul was able for a season to banish the nameless forms that haunt the dim borders of insanity, he would sit in that valley for hours, regarding the wider-spread valley below him, in which he knew every height and hollow, and, with his exceptionally keen sight, he could descry signs of life where another would have beheld but an every-way dead level. Not a live thing, it seemed almost, could spread wing or wag tail, but Steenie would become thereby aware of its presence. Kirsty, boastful to her parents of the faculty of Steenie, said to her father one day,

"I dinna believe, father, wi Steenie on the bog, a reid worm cud stick up his heid oot o' 't ohn him seen't!"

"I'm thinkin that's no sayin ower muckle, wuman!" returned David. "I never jist set mysel to luik, but

565871

I dinna think I ever did tak notice o' a worm settin up that heid o' his oot o' a bog. I dinna think it's a sile they care aboot. I kenna what they would get to please them there. It's the yerd they live upo'. Whaur craps winna grow, I doobt gien worms can live."

Kirsty laughed: she had made herself ridiculous, but the ridicule of some is sweeter than the praise of others.

Steenie set about his house-building at once, and when he had got as far as he could without her, called for help from Kirsty, who never interfered with, and never failed him. Divots he was able to cut, and of them he provided a good quantity, but when it came to moving stones, two pairs of hands were often wanted. Indeed, before the heavier work of "Steenie's hoosie" was over, the two had to beg the help of more—of their father, and of men from the farm.

During its progress, Phemy Craig paid rather a lengthened visit to Corbyknowe, and often joined the two in their labor on the Horn. She was not very strong, but would carry a good deal in the course of the day; and through this association with Steenie, her dread of him gradually vanished, and they became comrades.

When Steenie's design was at length carried out, they had built up with stone and lime the open spaces between several of the rocks; had cased these curtain-walls outside and lined them inside with softer and warmer walls of fells or divots cut from the green sod of the hill; and had covered in the whole as they found it possible—very irregularly no doubt,

but smoothing up all the corners and hollows with turf and heather. This done, one of the men who was a good thatcher, fastened the whole roof down with strong lines, so that the wind should not get under and strip it off. The result was a sort of burrow, consisting of several irregular compartments with open communication—or rather, perhaps, of a single chamber composed of recesses. One small rock they included quite: Steenie would make it serve for a table, and some of its inequalities for shelves. In one of the compartments or recesses, they contrived a fireplace, and in another a tolerably well-concealed exit; for Steenie, like a trap-door-spider, could not endure the thought of only one way out: one way was enough for getting in, but two were needful for getting out, his best refuge being the open hill.

The night came at length when Steenie, in whose heart was a solemn, silent jubilation, would take formal possession of his house. It was soft and warm, in the middle of the month of July. The sun had been set about an hour when he got up to leave the parlor, where the others always sat in the summer, and where Steenie would now and then appear among them. As usual he said good-night to no one of them, but stole gently out.

Kirsty knew what was in his mind, but was careful not to show that she took any heed of his departure. As soon as her father and mother retired, however, when he had been gone about half an hour, she put aside her work, and hastened out. She felt a little anxious about him though she could not have said why. She had no dread of displeasing by rejoining

him; nothing but a sight of the bonny man could, she knew, give him more delight than having her to share his night-watch with him. This she had done several times, and they were the only occasions on which, so far as he could tell, he had slept any part of the night.

Folded in the twilight, Earth lay as still and peaceful as if she had never done any wrong, never seen anything wrong in one of her children. There was light everywhere, and darkness everywhere to make it strange. A pale-green gleam prevailed in the heavens, as if the world were a glow-worm that sent abroad its home-born radiance into space, and colored the sky. In the green light rested a few small solid clouds with sharp edges, and almost an assertion of repose. Throughout the night it would be no darker! The sun seemed already to have begun to rise, only he would be all night about it. From the door she saw the point of the Horn clear against the green sky: Steenie would be up there soon! he was hurrying thither! Sometimes he went very leisurely, stopping and gazing, or sitting down to meditate: he would not do so that night! A special solemnity in his countenance made her sure that he would go straight to his new house. But she could walk faster than he, and would not be long behind him!

The sky was full of pale stars, and Kirsty amused herself, as she went, with arranging them—not into their constellations, though she knew the shapes and names of most of them, but into mathematical figures. The only star Steenie knew by name was the pole star, which, however, he always called *The bonny*

man's lantern. Kirsty believed he had thoughts of his own about many another, and a name for it too.

She had climbed the hill, and was drawing near the house, when she was startled by a sound of something like singing, and stopped to listen. She had never heard Steenie attempt to sing, and the very thought of his doing so moved her greatly: she was always expecting something marvellous to show itself in him. She drew nearer. It was not singing, but it was something like it, or something trying to be like it—a succession of broken, harsh, imperfect sounds, with here and there a tone of brief sweetness. She thought she perceived in it an attempt at melody, but the many notes that refused to be made, prevented her from finding the melody intended, or the melody, rather, after which he was feeling. The broken music ceased suddenly, and a different kind of sound succeeded. She went yet nearer. He could not be reading: she had tried to teach him to read, but the genuine effort he put forth to learn made his head ache, and his eyes feel wild, he said, and she at once gave up the endeavor. When she reached the door, she could plainly hear him praying.

He had been accustomed to hear his father pray—always extempore. To the Scot's mind it is a perplexity how prayer and reading should ever seem one. Kirsty went a little deeper into the matter when she said:—

"The things that I want, I ken; and I maun hae them! There's nae necessity ava to tell me what I want. The buik may wauk a sense o' want, I daur say, I dinna ken, but it maistly pits intil me the

thoucht o' something a body micht weel want, without makin me awaur o' wantin't at that preceese moment."

Prayer, with Steenie, as well as with Kirsty, was the utterance, audible or silent, in the ever open ear, of what was moving in him at the time. This was what she now heard him say:—

"Bonny man, I ken ye weel: there's naebody in h'aven or earth 'at's like ye! Ye ken yersel I wad jist dee for ye; or gien there be onything waur to bide nor deein, that's what I would du for ye—gien ye wantit it o' me, that is, for I'm houpin sair 'at ye winna want it, I'm that awfu cooardly! Oh bonny man, tak the fear oot o' my hert, and mak me ready jist to walk aff o' the face o' the warl, weichty feet and a', to du yer wull, ohn thoucht twise aboot it! And eh, bonny man, willna ye come doon sometime or lang, and walk the hill here, that I may luik upo' ye ance mair—as i' the days of old, whan the starlicht muntain shook wi' the micht o' the prayer ye heavit up til yer father in h'aven? Eh, gien ye war but ance to luik in at the door o' this my hoose that ye hae gie me, it wud henceforth be to me as the gate o' paradise! But, 'deed, it's that onygait, for it's nigh whaur ye tak yer walks abro'd. But gien ye *war* to luik in at the door, and cry *Steenie!* sune wud ye see whether I was in the hoose or no!—I thank ye sair for this hoose: I'm gaein to hae a rich and a happy time upo' this hill o' Zion, whaur the feet o' the ae man gangs walkin!—And eh, bonny man, gie a luik i' the face o' my father and mither i' their bed ower at the Knowe; and I pray ye see 'at Kirsty's gettin a fine sleep, for she has a heap o' tribble wi'

me. I'm no worth min'in', yet ye min' me: she is worth min'in'!—and that clever!—as ye ken wha made her! And luik upo' this bit hoosie, 'at I ca' my ain, and they a' helpit me to bigg, but as a lean-to til the hoose at hame, for I'm no awa frae it or them —jist as that hoose and this hoose and a' the hooses are a' jist but bairnies' hooses biggit by themsels aboot the big flure o' thy kitchie and i' the neuks o' the same—wi' yer ain truffs and stanes and divots, sir."

Steenie's voice ceased, and Kirsty, thinking his prayer had come to an end, knocked at the door, lest her sudden appearance should startle him. From his knees, as she knew by the sound of his rising, Steenie sprang up, came darting to the door with the cry, "It's yersel'! It's yersel', bonny man!" and seemed to tear it open. Oh, how sorry was Kirsty to stand where the loved of the human was not! She had almost turned and fled.

"It's only me, Steenie!" she faltered, nearly crying.

Steenie stood and stared. Neither, for a moment or two, could speak.

"Eh, Steenie," said Kirsty at length, "I'm richt sorry I disapp'intit ye! I didna ken what I was duin. I oucht to hae turnt and gane hame again!"

"Ye cudna help it," answered Steenie. "Ye cudna be him, or ye wud! But ye're the neist best, and richt welcome. I'm as glaid as can be to see ye, Kirsty. Come awa ben the hoose."

Kirsty followed him in silence, and sat down dejected. The loving heart saw it.

"Maybe ye're him efter a'!" said Steenie. "He

can tak ony shape he likes. I wudna won'er gien ye was him! Ye're unco like him ony gait!"

"Na, na, Steenie! I'm far frae that! But I wud fain be what he wud hae me, jist as ye wud yersel. Sae ye maun tak me, what I am, for his sake, Steenie!"

This was the man's hour, not the dog's, yet Steenie threw himself at her feet.

"Gang oot a bit by yersel, Steenie," she said, caressing him with her hand. "That's what ye like best, I ken! Ye needna min' me! I only cam to see ye sattlet intil yer ain hoose. I'll bide a gey bit. Gang ye oot, and ken 'at I'm i' the hoose, and that ye can come back to me whan ye like. I hae my buik, and can sit and read fine."

"Ye're aye richt, Kirsty!" answered Steenie, rising. "Ye aye ken what I'm needin. I maun win oot, for I'm some chokin like.—But jist come here a minute first," he went on, leading the way to the door. There he pointed up into the wild of stars, and said, "Ye see yon star o' the tap o' that ither ane 'at's brichter nor itsel?"

"I see 't fine, and ken 't weel," answered Kirsty.

"Weel, whan that starnie comes richt ower the white tap o' yon stane i' the mids o' that side o' the howe, I s' be here at the door."

Kirsty looked at the stone, saw that the star would arrive at the point indicated in about an hour, and said, "Weel, I'll be expeckin ye, Steenie!" whereupon he departed, going farther up the hill to court the soothing of the silent heaven.

In conditions of consciousness known only to himself and incommunicable, the poor fellow sustained

an all but continuous hand-to-hand struggle with insanity, more or less agonized according to the nature and force of its varying assault; in which struggle, if not always victorious, he had yet never been defeated. Often tempted to escape misery by death, he had hitherto stood firm. Some part of every solitary night was spent, I imagine, in fighting that or other evil suggestion. Doubtless, what kept him lord of himself through all the truth-aping delusions that usurped his consciousness, was his unyielding faith in the bonny man.

The name by which he so constantly thought and spoke of the saviour of men was not of his own finding. The story was well known of the idiot, who, having partaken of the Lord's supper, was heard, as he retired, murmuring to himself, "Eh, the bonny man! the bonny man!" and persons were not wanting, sound in mind as large of heart, who thought the idiot might well have seen him who came to deliver them that were bound. Steenie took up the tale with most believing mind. Never doubting the man had seen the Lord, he responded with the passionate desire himself to see *the bonny man.* It awoke in him while yet quite a boy, and never left him, but, increasing as he grew, became, as well it might, a fixed idea, a sober, waiting, unebbing passion, urging him to righteousness and loving-kindness.

Kirsty took from her pocket an old translation of Plato's "Phædo," and sat absorbed in it until the star, unheeded of her, attained its goal, and there was Steenie by her side! She shut the book and rose.

"I'm a heap better, Kirsty," said Steenie. "The ill color's awa doon the stair, and the saft win' 's

made its w'y oot o' the lift, an' 's won at me. I 'maist think a han' cam and clappit my heid. Sae noo I'm jist as weel's there's ony need to be o' this side the mist. It helpit me a heap to ken 'at ye was sittin there: I cud aye rin til ye!—Noo gang awa to yer bed, ond tak a guid sleep. I'm some thinkin I'll be hame til my br'akfast."

"Weel, mother's gaein to the toon the morn, and I'll be wantit fell air; I may as weel gang!" answered Kirsty, and without a good-night, or farewell of any sort, for she knew how he felt in regard to leave-takings, Kirsty left him, and went slowly home. The moon was up and so bright that every now and then she would stop for a moment and read a little from her book, then walk on thinking about it.

From that night, even in the stormy dark of winter, Kirsty was not nearly so anxious about Steenie away from the house: on the Horn he had his place of refuge, and she knew he never ventured on the bog after sunset. He always sought her when he wanted to sleep in the daytime, but he was gradually growing quieter in his mind, and Kirsty had reason to think, slept a good deal more at night.

But the better he grew the more had he the look of one expecting something; and Kirsty often heard him saying to himself—"It's comin! it's comin!"

"And at last," she said, telling his story many years after, "at last it cam; and ahint it, I doobtna, cam the face o' the bonny man!"

CHAPTER XV

PHEMY CRAIG

THINGS went on in the same way for four years more, the only visible change being that Kirsty seldomer went about barefooted. She was now between two and three and twenty. Her face, whose ordinary expression had always been of quiet, was now in general quieter still; but when heart or soul was moved, it would flash and glow as only such a face could. Live revelation of deeps rarely rippled save by the breath of God, how could it but grow more beautiful! Cloud or shadow of cloud was hardly ever to be seen upon it. Her mother, much younger than her father, was still well and strong, and Kirsty, still not much wanted at home, continued to spend the greater part of her time with her brother and her books. As to her person, she was now in the first flower of harmonious womanly strength. Nature had indeed done what she could to make her a lady, but Nature was not her mother, and Kirsty's essential ladyhood came from higher up, namely, from the Source itself of Nature. Simple truth was its crown, and grace was the garment of it. To see her walk or run was to look on the divine idea of Motion.

As for Steenie, he looked the same loose lank lad as before, with a smile almost too sad to be a smile, and a laugh in which there was little hilarity. His

pleasures were no doubt deep and high, but seldom, even to Kirsty, manifested themselves except in the after-glow.

Phemy was now almost a woman. She was rather little, but had a nice figure, which she knew instinctively how to show to advantage. Her main charm lay in her sweet complexion—strong in its contrast of colors, but wonderfully perfect in the blending of them: the gradations in the live picture were exquisite. She was gentle of temper, with a shallow birdlike friendliness, an accentuated confidence that every one meant her well, which was very taking. But she was far too much pleased with herself to be a necessity to any one else. Her father grew more and more proud of her, but remained entirely independent of her; and Kirsty could not help wondering at times how he would feel were he given one peep into the chaotic mind which he fancied so lovely a cosmos. A good fairy godmother would for her discipline, Kirsty imagined, turn her into the prettiest wax doll, but with real eyes, and put her in a glass case for the admiration of all, until she sickened of her very consciousness. But Kirsty loved the pretty doll, and cherished any influence she had with her against a possible time when it might be sorely needed. She still encouraged her, therefore, to come to Corbyknowe as often as she felt inclined. Her father never interfered with any of her goings and comings. At the present point of my narrative, however, Kirsty began to notice that Phemy did not care so much for being with her as hitherto.

She had been, of course, for some time, the cynosure of many neighboring eyes, but had taken only

the more pleasure in the cynosure, none in the persons with the eyes, all of whom she regarded as much below her. To herself she was the only young lady in Tiltowie, an assurance strengthened by the fact that no young man had yet ventured to make love to her, which she took as a general admission of their social inferiority, behaving to all the young men the more sweetly in consequence.

The tendency of a weakly artistic nature to occupy itself much with its own dress was largely developed in her. It was wonderful, considering the smallness of her father's income, how well she arrayed herself. She could make a scanty material go a great way in setting off her attractions. The judicial element of the neighborhood, not content with complaining that she spent so much of her time in making her dresses, accused her of spending much money upon them, whereas she spent less than most of the girls of the neighborhood, who cared only for a good stuff, a fast color, and the fashion: fit to figure and fitness to complexion they did not trouble themselves about. The possession of a fine gown was the important thing. As to how it made them look, they had not imagination enough to consider that.

She possessed, however, another faculty on which she prided herself far more, her ignorance and vanity causing her to mistake it for a grand accomplishment —the faculty of verse-making. She inherited a certain modicum of her father's rhythmic and rhyming gift; she could string words almost as well as she could string beads, and many thought her clever because she could do what they could not. Her aunt judged her verses marvellous, and her father considered them full of promise. The minister, on the

other hand, held them unmistakably silly—as her father would had they not been hers and she his. Only the poorest part of his poetic equipment had propagated in her, and had he taught her anything, she would not have overvalued it so much. Herself full of mawkish sentimentality, her verses could not fail to be foolish, their whole impulse being the ambition that springs from self-admiration. She had begun to look down on Kirsty, who would so gladly have been a mother to the motherless creature: she was not a lady! Neither in speech, manners, nor dress, was she or her mother *genteel*! Their free, hearty, simple bearing, in which was neither smallest roughness, nor least suggestion of affected refinement, was not to Phemy's taste, and she began to assume condescending ways.

It was of course a humiliation to Phemy to have an aunt in Mrs. Bremner's humble position, but she loved her after her own feeble fashion, and, although she would willingly have avoided her upon occasion, went not unfrequently to the castle to see her; for the kind-hearted woman spoiled her. Not only did she admire her beauty, and stand amazed at her wonderful cleverness, but she drew from her little store a good part of the money that went to adorn the pretty butterfly. She gave her at the same time the best of advice, and imagined she listened to it; but the young who take advice are almost beyond the need of it. Fools must experience a thing themselves before they will believe it; and then, remaining fools, they wonder that their children will not heed their testimony. Faith is the only charm by which the experience of one becomes a vantage-ground for the start of another. . . . . .

CHAPTER XVI

SHAM LOVE

ONE day Phemy went to Castle Weelset to see her aunt, and walking down the garden to find her, met the young laird.

Through respect for the memory of his father, he had just received from the East India Company a commission in his father's regiment; and having in about six weeks to pass the slight examination required, and then sail to join it, had come to see his mother and bid her good-by. He was a youth no longer, but a handsome young fellow, with a pale face and a rather weary, therefore what some would call an interesting look. For many months he had been leading an idle life.

He lifted his hat to Phemy, looked again, and recognized her. They had been friends when she was a child, but since he saw her last she had grown a young woman. She was gliding past him with a pretty bow, and a prettier blush and smile, when he stopped and held out his hand.

"It's not possible!" he said; "you can't be little Phemy!—Yet you must be!—Why, you're a grown lady! To think how you used to sit on my knee, and stroke my face! How is your father?"

Phemy murmured a shy answer, a little goose but blushing a very flamingo. In her heart she saw before her the very man for her hero. A woman's hero

gives some measure, not of what she is, hardly of what she would like to be, but of what she would like to pass for: here was the ideal for which Phemy had so long been waiting, and wherein consisted his glory? In youth, position, and good looks! She gazed up at him with a mixture of shyness and boldness not uncommon in persons of her silly kind, and Francis not only saw but felt that she was an unusually pretty girl: although he had long ceased to admire his mother, he still admired the sort of beauty she once had. He saw also that she was very prettily dressed, and, being one of those men who, imagining themselves gentlemen, feel at liberty to take liberties with women socially their inferiors, he plucked a pheasant-eye-narcissus in the border, and said—at the same time taking the leave he asked,—

"Let me finish your dress by adding this to it! Have you got a pin?—There! —all you wanted to make you just perfect!"

Her face was now in a very flame. She saw he was right in the flower he had chosen, and he saw, not his artistic success only, but her recognition of it as well, and was gratified. He had a keen feeling of harmony in form and color, and flattered women, while he paraded his own insight, by bringing it to bear on their dress.

The flower, in its new position, seemed radiant with something of the same beauty in which it was set; it was *like* the face above it, and hinted a sympathetic relation with the whole dainty person of the girl. But in truth there was more expression in the flower than was yet in the face. The flower expressed what God was thinking of when he made it; the face what

the girl was thinking of herself. When she ceased thinking of herself then, like the flower, she would show what God was thinking of when he made her.

Francis, like the man he was, thought what a dainty little lady she would make if he had the making of her, and at once began talking as he never would have talked had she been what is conventionally called a lady—with a familiarity, namely, to which their old acquaintance gave him no right, and which showed him not his sister's keeper. She, poor child, was pleased with his presumption, taking it for a sign that he regarded her as a lady; and from that moment her head at least was full of the young laird. She had forgotten all she came about. When he turned and walked down the garden, she walked alongside of him like a linnet by a tall stork, who thought of her as a very pretty green frog. Lost in delight at his kindness, and yet more at his admiration, she felt as safe in his hands as if he had been her guardian angel: had he not convinced her that her notion of herself was correct! Who should know better whether she was a lady, whether she was lovely or not, than this great, handsome, perfect gentleman! Unchecked by any question of propriety, she accompanied him without hesitation into a little arbor at the bottom of the garden, and sat down with him on the bench there provided for the weary and the idle—in this case a going-to-be gallant officer, bored to death by a week at home with his mother, and a girl who spent the most of her time in making, altering, and wearing her dresses.

"How good it was of you, Phemy," he said, "to come and see me! I was ready to cut my throat for

want of something pretty to look at. I was thinking it the ugliest place with the ugliest of people, wondering how I had ever been able to live in it. How unfair I was! The whole country is beautiful now!"

"I am so glad," answered poor Phemy, hardly knowing what she said: it was to her the story of a sad gentleman who fell in love at first sight with a beautiful lady who was learning to love him through pity.

Her admiration of him was as clear as the red and white on her face; and foolish Francis felt in his turn flattered, for he too was fond of himself. There is no more pitiable sight to lovers of their kind, or any more laughable to its haters, than two persons falling into the love rooted in self-love. But possibly they are neither to be pitied nor laughed at; they may be plunging thus into a saving hell.

"You would like to make the world beautiful for me, Phemy?" rejoined Francis.

"I should like to make it a paradise!" returned Phemy.

"A garden of Eden, and you the Eve in it?" suggested Francis.

Phemy could find no answer beyond a confused look and a yet deeper blush.

Talk elliptical followed, not unmingled with looks bold and shy. They had not many objects of thought in common, therefore not many subjects for conversation. There was no poetry in Gordon, and but the flimsiest sentiment in Phemy. Her mind was feebly active, his full of tedium. Hers was open to any temptation from him, and his to the temptations of usurping the government of her world, of constituting himself the benefactor of this innocent creature,

and enriching her life with the bliss of loving a noble object. Of course he meant nothing serious! Equally of course he would do her no harm! To lose him would make her miserable for a while, but she would not die of love, and would have something to think about all her dull life afterward!

Phemy at length got frightened at the thought of being found with him, and together they went to look for her aunt. Finding her in an outhouse that was used for a laundry, Francis told Mrs. Bremner that they had been in the garden ever so long searching for her, and he was glad of the opportunity of hearing about his old friend, Phemy's father!

The aunt was not quite pleased, but said little.

The following Sunday she told the schoolmaster what had taken place, and came home in a rage at the idiocy of a man who would not open his eyes when his house was on fire. It was all her sister's fault, she said, for having married such a book-idiot! She felt indeed very uncomfortable, and did her best in the way of warning; but Phemy seemed so incapable of understanding what ill could come of letting the young laird talk to her, that she despaired of rousing in her any sense of danger, and having no authority over her was driven to silence for the present. She would have spoken to her mistress, had she not plainly foreseen that it would be of no use, that she would either laugh, and say young men must have their way, or fly into a fury with Phemy for trying to entrap *her* son, and with Mrs. Bremner for imagining he would look at the hussy; while one thing was certain—that, if his mother opposed him, Francis would persist.

CHAPTER XVII

A NOVEL ABDUCTION

PHEMY went seldom to the castle, but the young laird and she met pretty often: there was solitude enough in that country for an army of lovers. Once or twice Gordon, at Phemy's entreaty, went and took tea with her at her father's, and was cordially received by the schoolmaster, who had no sense of impropriety in their strolling out together afterward, leaving him well content with the company of his books. Before this had happened twice, all the town was talking about it, and predicting evil. Phemy heard nothing and feared nothing; but if feeling had been weather and talk tempest, she would have been glad enough to keep within. So rapidly, however, did the whirlwind of tongues extend its gyration that within half a week it reached Kirsty, and cast her into great trouble: her poor silly defenceless Phemy, the child of her friend, was in danger from the son of her father's friend! Her father could do nothing, for Francis would not listen to him, therefore she herself, must do something! She could not sit still and look on at the devil's work! Having always been on terms of sacred intimacy with her mother, she knew more of the dangers of the world, while she was far safer from them, than such girls as their natural guardians watch instead of fortifying, and un-

derstood perfectly that an unwise man is not to be trusted with a foolish girl. She felt, therefore, that inaction on her part would be faithlessness to the teaching of her mother, as well as treachery to her father, whose friend's son was in peril of doing a fearful wrong to one to whom he owed almost a brother's protection for his schoolmaster's sake. She did not believe that Francis *meant* Phemy any harm, but she was certain he thought too much of himself ever to marry her, and were the poor child's feelings to go for nothing? She had no hope that Phemy would listen to expostulation from her, but she must in fairness, before she *did* anything, have some speech with her!

She made repeated efforts, therefore, to see her, but without success. She tried one time of the day after another, but, now by accident and now by clever contrivance, Phemy was not to be come at. She had of late grown tricky. One of the windows of the schoolmaster's house commanded the street in both directions, and Phemy commanded the window. When she saw Kirsty coming, she would run into the garden and take refuge in the summer-house, telling the servant on her way that she was going out, and did not know what time she would be in. On more occasions than one Kirsty said she would wait, when Phemy, learning she was not gone, went out in earnest, and took care she had enough of waiting. Such shifts of cunning no doubt served laughter to the lovers when next they met, but they showed that Phemy was in some degree afraid of Kirsty.

Had Kirsty known the schoolmaster no better than his sister-in-law knew him, she would, like her, have

gone to him; but she was perfectly certain that it would be almost impossible to rouse him, and that, once convinced that his confidence had been abused, he would be utterly furious, and probably bear himself in such fashion as to make Phemy desperate: perhaps make her hate him. As it was, he turned a deaf ear and indignant heart to every one of the reports that reached him. To listen to it would be to doubt his child! Why should not the young laird fall in love with her? What more natural? Was she not worth as much honor as any man, be he who he might, could confer upon her? He cursed the gossips of the town, and returned to his book.

Convinced at length that Phemy declined an interview, Kirsty resolved to take her own way. And her way was a somewhat masterful one.

About a mile from Castle Weelset, in the direction of Tiltowie, the road was, for a few hundred yards, close-flanked by steep heathery braes. Now Kirsty had heard of Phemy's being several times seen on this road of late; and near the part of it I have just described, she resolved to waylay her. From the brae on the side next Corbyknowe, she could see the road for some distance in either direction.

For a week she watched in vain. She saw the two pass together more than once, and she saw Francis pass alone, but she had never seen Phemy alone.

One morning, just as she arrived at her usual outlook, she saw Mrs. Bremner in the road below, coming from the castle, and ran down to speak to her. In the course of their conversation she learned that Francis was to start for London the next morning.

When they parted, the old woman resuming her walk to Tiltowie, Kirsty climbed the brae and sat down in the heather. She was more anxious than ever. She had done her best, but it had come to nothing, and now she had but one chance more! That Francis Gordon was going away so soon was good news, but what might not happen even yet before he went! At the same time she could think of nothing better than keep watch as hitherto, firm as to her course if she saw Phemy alone, but now determined to speak to both if Francis was with her, and all but determined to speak to Francis alone, if an opportunity of doing so should be given her.

All the morning and afternoon she watched in vain, eating nothing but a piece of bread that Steenie brought her. At last, in the evening—it was an evening in September, cold and clear, the sun down, and a melancholy glory hanging over the place of his vanishing—she spied the solitary form of Phemy hastening along the road in the direction of the castle. Although she had been on the outlook for her all day, she was at the moment so taken up with the sunset, that Phemy was almost under where she stood before she saw her. She ran at full speed a hundred yards, then slid down a part of the brae too steep to climb, and leaped into the road a few feet in front of Phemy —so suddenly, that the girl started with a cry, and stopped. The moment she saw who it was, however, she drew herself up, and would have passed with a stiff greeting. But Kirsty stood in front of her, and would not permit her.

"What do you want, Kirsty Barclay?" demanded Phemy, who had within the last week or two ad-

vanced considerably in confidence of manner; "I am in a hurry!"

"Ye're in a waur hurry nor ye ken, for yer hurry sud be the ither gait!" answered Kirsty; "and I'm gaein to turn ye, or at least, no gaein to lat ye gang, ohn heard a bit o' the trowth frae a woman aulder nor yersel! Lassie, ye seem to think naebody worth hearkenin til a word frae 'cep aè man, but I mean ye to hearken to me! Ye dinna ken what ye're aboot! I ken Francie Gordon a heap better nor you, and though I ken nae ill o' him, I ken as little guid: he never did naething yet but to please himsel, and there never came salvation or comfort to man, woman, or bairn frae ony puir cratur like *him!*"

"How dare you speak such lies of a gentleman behind his back!" cried Phemy, her eyes flashing. "He is a friend of mine, and I will not hear him maligned!"

"There's sma' hairm can come to ony man frae the trowth, Phemy!" answered Kirsty. "Set the man afore me, and I'll say word for word intil his face what I'm sayin to you ahint his back."

"Miss Barclay," rejoined Phemy, with a rather pitiable attempt at dignity, "I can permit no one to call me by my Christian name who speaks ill of the man to whom I am engaged!"

"That s' be as ye please, Miss Craig. But I wud lat you ca' me a' the ill names in the dictionar to get ye to heark to me! I'm tellin ye naething but what's true as death."

"I call no one names. I am always civil to my neighbors whoever they may be! I will not listen to you."

"Eh, lassie, there's but feow o' yer neebors ceevil to yer name, whatever they be to yersel! There's hardly ane has a guid word for ye, Phemy!—Miss Craig—I beg yer pardon!"

"Their lying tongues are nothing to me! I know what I am about! I will not stay a moment longer with you! I have an important engagement."

Once more, as several times already, she would have passed her, but Kirsty stepped yet again in front of her.

"I can weel tak yer word," replied Kirsty, "'at ye hae an engagement; but ye said a minute ago 'at ye was engaged til him: tell me in ae word—has Francie Gordon promised to merry ye?"

"He has as good as asked me," answered Phemy, who had fits of apprehensive recoil from a downright lie.

"Noo there I cud 'maist believe ye! Ay, that wud be ill eneuch for Francie! He never was a doonricht leear, sae lang's I kenned him—ony mair nor yersel! But, for God's sake, Phemy, dinna imagine he'll ever merry ye, for that he wull not."

"This is really insufferable!" cried Phemy, in a voice that began to tremble from the approach of angry tears. "Pray, have *you* a claim upon him?"

"Nane, no a shedow o' ane," returned Kirsty. "But my father and his father war like brithers, and we hae a' to du what we can for his father's son. I wud fain haud him ohn gotten into trouble wi' you or ony lass."

"*I* get him into trouble! Really, Miss Barclay, I do not know how to understand you!"

"I see I maun be plain wi' ye: I wudna hae ye get

him into trouble by lattin him get you into trouble! —and that's plain speykin!"

"You insult me!" said Phemy.

"Ye drive me to speyk plain!" answered Kirsty. "That lad, Francie Gordon,——"

"Speak with respect of your superiors," interrupted Phemy.

"I'll speyk wi respec o' onybody I hae respec for!" answered Kirsty.

"Let me pass, you rude young woman!" cried Phemy, who had of late been cultivating in her imagination such speech as she thought would befit Mrs. Gordon of Castle Weelset.

"I winna lat ye pass," answered Kirsty; "—that is, no till ye hear what I hae to say to ye."

"Then you must take the consequences!" rejoined Phemy, and, in the hope that her lover would prove within earshot, began a piercing scream.

It roused something in Kirsty which she could not afterward identify: she was sure it had nothing to do with anger. She felt, she said, as if she had to deal with a child who insisted on playing with fire beside a barrel of gunpowder. At the same time she did nothing but what she had beforehand, in case of the repulse she expected, resolved upon. She caught up the little would-be lady, as if she had been that same naughty child, and the suddenness of the action so astonished her that for a moment or two she neither moved nor uttered a sound. The next, however, she began to shriek and struggle wildly, as if in the hug of a bear or the coils of an anaconda, whereupon Kirsty closed her mouth with one hand while she held her fast with the other. It was a violent proceeding,

doubtless, but Kirsty chose to be thus far an offender, and yet farther.

Bearing her as she best could in one arm, she ran with her toward Tiltowie until she reached a place where the road was bordered by a more practicable slope; here she took to the moorland, and made for Corbyknowe. Her resolve had been from the first, if Phemy would not listen, to carry her, like the unmanageable child she was, home to the mother whose voice had always been to herself the oracle of God. It was in a loving embrace, though hardly a comfortable one, and to a heart full of pity, that she pressed the poor little runaway lamb: her mother was God's vicar for all in trouble: she would bring the child to reason! Her heart beating mightily with love and labor, she waded through the heather, hurrying along the moor.

It was a strange abduction; but Kirsty was divinely simple, and that way strange. Not until they were out of sight of the road did she set her down.

"Noo, Phemy," she said, panting as she spoke, "haud yer tongue like a guid lassie, and come awa upo' yer ain feet."

Phemy took at once to her heels and her throat, and ran shrieking back toward the road, with Kirsty after her like a greyhound. Phemy had for some time given up struggling and trying to shriek, and was therefore in better breath than Kirsty whose lungs were pumping hard, but she had not a chance with her, for there was more muscle in one of Kirsty's legs than in Phemy's whole body. In a moment she had her in her arms again, and so fast that she could not even kick. She gave way and burst into tears.

Kirsty relaxed her hold.

"What are you gaein to du wi' me?" sobbed Phemy.

"I'm takin ye to the best place I ken—hame to my mother," answered Kirsty, striding on for home-heaven as straight as she could go.

"I winna gang!" cried Phemy, whose Scotch had returned with her tears.

"Ye *are* gaein," returned Kirsty dryly; "—at least I'm takin ye, and that's neist best."

"What for? I never did ye an ill turn 'at I ken o'!" said Phemy, and burst afresh into tears of self-pity and sense of wrong.

"Na, my bonny doo," answered Kirsty, "ye never did me ony ill turn! It wasna in ye. But that's the less rizzon 'at I sudna du you a guid ane. And yer father has been like the Bountiful himsel to me! It's no muckle I can for you or for him, but there's ae thing I'm set upo', and that's haudin ye frae Francie Gordon the nicht. He'll be awa the morn!"

"Wha tellt ye that?" returned Phemy with a start.

"Jist yer ain aunt, honest woman!" answered Kirsty, "and sair she grat as she telled me, but it wasna at his gaein!"

"She micht hae held the tongue o' her till he was gane! What was there to greit aboot!"

"Maybe she thocht o' her sister's bairn in a trible 'at silence wadna hide!" answered Kirsty. "Ye haena a notion, lassie, what ye're duin wi' yersel! But my mither 'll lat ye ken, sae that ye gangna blinlins intil the tod's hole."

"You dinna ken Frank, or ye wudna speyk o' 'im that gait!"

"I ken him ower weel to trust you til him."

"It's naething but ye're eenvious o' me, Kirsty, 'cause ye canna get him yersel! He wud never luik at a lass like you!"

"It's weel a'body seesna wi' the same een, Phemy! Gien I had yer Francie i' the parritch-pat, I wudna pike him oot, but fling frae me pat and parritch. For a' that, I hae a haill side o' my hert saft til him: my father and his lo'ed like brithers."

"That canna be Kirsty—and it's no like ye to blaw! Your father was a common so'dier and his was cornel o' the regiment!"

"Allooin!" was all Kirsty's answer. Phemy betook herself to entreaty.

"Lat me gang, Kirsty! Please! I'll gang doon o' my knees til ye! I canna bide him to think I've played him fause."

"He'll play you fause, my lamb, whatever ye du or he think! It maks my hert sair to ken 'at no guid will your hert get o' his.—He s'no see ye the nicht, ony gait!"

Phemy uttered a childish howl, but immediately choked it with a proud sob.

"Ye're hurtin me, Kirsty," she said, after a minute or so of silence. "Lat me doon, and I'll gang straucht hame to my father. I promise ye."

"I'll set ye doon," answered Kirsty, "but ye maun come hame to my mither."

"What'll my father think?"

"I' s'no forget yer father," said Kirsty.

She sent out a strange, piercing cry, set Phemy down, took her hand in hers, and went on, Phemy making no resistance. In about three minutes there

was a noise in the heather, and Snootie came rushing to Kirsty. A few moments more and Steenie lifted his bonnet to Phemy, and stood waiting his sister's commands.

"Steenie," she said, "tak the dog wi' ye, and rin doon to the toon, and tell Mr. Craig 'at Phemy here's comin hame wi' me, to bide the nicht. Ye winna be langer nor ye canna help, and ye'll come to the hoose afore ye gang to the hill?"

"I'll du that, Kirsty. Come, doggie."

Steenie never went to the town of his own accord, and Kirsty never liked him to go, for the boys were rude, but to-night it would be dark before he reached it.

"Ye're no surely gaun to gar me bide a' nicht!" said Phemy, beginning again to cry.

"I am that—the nicht, and maybe the morn's nicht, and ony nummer o' nichts till we're sure he's awa!" answered Kirsty, resuming her walk.

Phemy wept aloud, but did not try to escape.

"And him gaein to promise this verra nicht 'at he would merry me!" she cried—but through her tears and sobs her words were indistinct.

Kirsty stopped, and faced round on her.

"He promised to merry ye?" she said.

"I didna say that; I said he was gaein to promise the nicht. And noo he'll be gane, and never a word said!"

"He promised, did he, 'at he would promise the nicht?—Eh, Francie! Francie! ye're no yer father's son!—He promised to promise to merry ye! Eh, ye puir gowk o' a bonny lassie!"

"Gien I met him the nicht—ay, it cam to that."

All Kirsty's inborn motherhood awoke. She turned to her, and, clasping the silly thing in her arms, cried out—

"Puir wee dauty! Gien he hae a hert ony bigger nor Tod Lowrie's (*the fox's*) ain, he'll come to ye to the Knowe, and say what he has to say!"

"He winna ken whaur I am!" answered Phemy, with an agonized burst of dry sobbing.

"Will he no? I s' see to that—and this verra nicht!" exclaimed Kirsty. "I'll gie him ilka chance o' doin the richt thing!"

"But he'll be angert at me!"

"What for? Did he tell ye no to tell?"

"Ay did he."

"Waur and waur!" cried Kirsty indignantly. "He wad hae ye a' in his grup! He tellt ye, nae doobt, 'at ye was the bonniest lassie 'at ever was seen, and bepraised ye 'at yer ain minnie wouldna hae kenned ye! Jist tell me, Phemy, dinna ye think a hantle mair o' yersel sin' he took ye in han'?"

She would have Phemy see that she had gathered from him no figs or grapes, only thorns and thistles.

Phemy made no reply: had she not every right to think well of herself? He had never said anything to her on that subject which she was not quite ready to believe.

Kirsty seemed to divine what was passing in her thought.

"A man," she said, "'at disna tell ye the trowth aboot himsel's no likely to tell ye the trowth aboot *your*sel! Did he tell ye hoo mony lassies he had said the same thing til afore ever he cam to you? It

maitered little sae lang as they war lasses as hertless and toom-heidit as himsel, and ower weel used to sic havers; but a lassie like you, 'at never afore hearkent to siclike, she taks them a' for trowth, and the leein sough o' him gars her trow there was never on earth sic a won'erfu cratur as her! What pleesur there can be i' leein 's mair nor I can faddom! Ye're jist a gey bonny lassie, siclike as mony anither; but gien ye war a' glorious within, like the queen o' Sheba, or whaever she may happen to hae been, there wad be naething to be proud o' i' that, seein ye didna contrive yersel. No ae stane, to bigg yersel, hae *ye* putten upo the tap o' anither!"

Phemy was nowise capable of understanding such statement and deduction. If she was lovely, as Frank told her, and as she saw in the glass, why should she not be pleased with herself? If Kirsty had been made like her, she would have been just as vain as she!

All her life the doll never saw the beauty of the woman. Beside Phemy, Kirsty walked like an Olympian goddess beside the naiad of a brook. And Kirsty was a goddess, for she was what she had to be, and never thought about it.

Phemy sank down in the heather, declaring she could go no farther, and looked so white and so pitiful that Kirsty's heart filled afresh with compassion. Like the mother she was, she took the poor girl yet again in her arms, and, carrying her quite easily now that she did not struggle, walked with her straight into her mother's kitchen.

Mrs. Barclay sat darning the stocking which would have been Kirsty's affair had she not been stalking

Phemy. She took it out of her mother's hands, and laid the girl in her lap.

"There's a new bairnie til ye, mother! Ye maun daut her a wee, she's unco tired!" she said, and seating herself on a stool, went on with the darning of the stocking.

Mistress Barclay looked down on Phemy with such a face of loving benignity that the poor miserable girl threw her arms round her neck, and laid her head on her bosom. Instinctively the mother began to hush and soothe her, and in a moment more was singing a lullaby to her. Phemy fell fast asleep. Then Kirsty told what she had done, and while she spoke, the mother sat silent, brooding, and hushing, and thinking.

CHAPTER XVIII

PHEMY'S CHAMPION

WHEN she had told all, Kirsty rose, and laying aside the stocking, said,

"I maun awa to Weelset, mother. I promised the bairn I would lat Francie ken whaur she was, and gie him the chance o' sayin his say til her."

"Verra weel, lassie! ye ken what ye're aboot, and I s' no interfere wi' ye. But, eh, ye'll be tired afore ye win to yer bed!"

"I'll no tramp it, mother; I'll tak the gray mear."

"She's gey and fresh, lassie; ye maun be on yer guaird."

"A' the better!" returned Kirsty.—"To hear ye, mother, a body wud think I cudna ride!"

"Forbid it, bairn! Yer father says, man or wuman, there's no ane i' the countryside like ye upo' beast-back."

"They tak to me, the craturs! It was themsels learnt me to ride!" answered Kirsty, as she took a riding whip from the wall, and went out of the kitchen.

The mare looked round when she entered the stable, and whinnied. Kirsty petted and stroked her, gave her two or three handfuls of oats, and while she was eating, strapped a cloth on her back: there was no side-saddle about the farm. Kirsty could ride well

enough sideways on a man's, but she liked the way her father had taught her far better. Utterly fearless, she had, in his training from childhood until he could do no more for her, grown to be a horsewoman such as few.

The moment the mare had finished her oats she bridled her, led her out, and sprang on her back; where sitting as on a pillion, she rode quietly out of the farm-close. The moment she was beyond the gate, she leaned back, and throwing her right foot over the mare's crest, rode like an Amazon, at ease, and with mastery. The same moment the mare was away, up hill and down dale, almost at racing speed. Had the coming moon been above the horizon, the Amazon farm-girl would have been worth meeting! So perfectly did she yield her lithe, strong body to every motion of the mare, abrupt or undulant, that neither ever felt a jar, and their movements seemed the outcome of a vital force common to the two. Kirsty never thought whether she was riding well or ill, gracefully or otherwise, but the mare knew that all was right between them. Kirsty never touched the bridle except to moderate the mare's pace when she was too much excited to heed what she said to her.

Doubtless, to many eyes, she would have looked better in a riding-habit, but she would have felt like an eagle in a nightgown. She wore a full winsey petticoat, which she managed perfectly, and stockings of the same color. On her head she had nothing but the silk net at that time and in that quarter much worn by young unmarried women. In the rush of the gallop it slipped and its contents escaped: she put the net in her pocket, and cast a knot upon her long

hair as if it had been a rope. This she did without even slackening her speed, transferring from her hand to her teeth the whip she carried. It was one colonel Gordon had given her father in remembrance of a little adventure they had together, in which a lash from it in the dark night was mistaken for a sword-cut, and did them no small service.

By the time they reached the castle, the moon was above the horizon. Kirsty brought the mare to a walk, and resuming her pillion-seat, remanded her hair to its cage, and readjusted her skirt; then, setting herself as in a side-saddle, she rode gently up to the castle-door.

A man, servant, happening to see her from the hall-window, saved her having to ring the bell, and greeted her respectfully, for everybody knew Corbyknowe's Kirsty. She said she wanted to see Mr. Gordon, and suggested that perhaps he would be kind enough to speak to her at the door. The man went to find his master, and in a minute or two brought the message that Mr. Gordon would be with her presently. Kirsty drew her mare back into the shadow which, the moon being yet low, a great rock on the crest of the neighboring hill cast upon the approach, and waited.

It was three minutes before Francis came sauntering bare-headed round the corner of the house, his hands in his pockets, and a cigar in his mouth. He gave a glance round, not seeing his visitor at once, and then, with a nod, came toward her, still smoking. His nonchalance, I believe, was forced and meant to cover uneasiness. For all that had passed to make him forget Kirsty, he yet remembered her uncomfort-

ably, and at the present moment could not help regarding her as an angelic *bête noir*, of whom he was more afraid than of any other human being. He approached her in a sort of sidling stroll as if he had no actual business with her, but thought of just asking whether she would sell her horse. He did not speak, but Kirsty sat motionless until he was near enough for a low-voiced conference.

"What are ye aboot wi' Phemy Craig, Francie?" she began, without a word of greeting.

Kirsty was one of the few who practically deny time; with whom what was, is; what is, will be. She spoke to the tall handsome man in the same tone and with the same forms as when they were boy and girl together.

He had meant their conversation to be at arm's length, so to say, but his intention broke down at once, and he answered her in the same style.

"I ken naething aboot her. What for sud I?" he answered.

"I ken ye dinna ken whaur she is, for I div," returned Kirsty. "Ye answer a question I never speired. What are ye aboot wi' Phemy, I challenge ye again! Puir lassie, she has nae brither to say the word!"

"That's a' verra weel; but ye see, Kirsty," he began—then stopped, and having stared at her a moment in silence, exclaimed, "Lord, what a splendid woman you've grown!"—He had probably been drinking with his mother.

Kirsty sat speechless, motionless, changeless as a soldier on guard. Gordon had to resume and finish his sentence.

"As I was going to say, *you* can't take the place of a brother to her, Kirsty, else I should know how to answer you!—It's awkward when a lady takes you to task!" he added with a drawl.

"Dinna trouble yer heid aboot that, Francie: hert ye hae little to trouble aboot onything!" rejoined Kirsty. Then changing to English as he had done, she went on: "I claim no consideration on that score."

Francis Gordon felt very uncomfortable. It was deuced hard to be bullied by a woman!

He stood silent because he had nothing to say.

"Do you mean to marry my Phemy?" asked Kirsty.

"Really, Miss Barclay," Francis began, but Kirsty interrupted him.

"Mr. Gordon," she said sternly, "be a man, and answer me. If you mean to marry her, say so, and go and tell her father—or my father, if you prefer. She is at the Knowe, miserable, poor child! that she did not meet you to-night. That was my doing; she could not help herself."

Gordon broke into a strained laugh.

"Well, you've got her, and you can keep her!" he said.

"You have not answered my question!"

"Really, Miss Barclay, you must not be too hard on a man! Is a fellow not to speak to a woman but he must say at once whether or not he intends to marry her?"

"Answer my question."

"It is a ridiculous one!"

"You have been trystin' with her almost every

night for something like a month!" rejoined Kirsty, "and the question is not at all ridiculous."

"Let it be granted then, and let the proper person ask me the question and I will answer it. You, pardon me, have nothing to do with the matter in hand."

"That is the answer of a coward," returned Kirsty, her cheek flaming at last. "You know the guileless nature of your old schoolmaster, and take advantage of it! You know that the poor girl has not a man to look to, and you will not have a woman befriend her! It is cowardly, ungrateful, mean, treacherous! You are a bad man, Francie! You always were a fool, but now you are a wicked fool! If I were her brother—if I were a man, I would thrash you!"

"It's a good thing you're not able, Kirsty! I should be frightened!" said Gordon, with a laugh and shrug, thinking to throw the thing aside as done with.

"I said, if I was a man!" returned Kirsty. "I did not say, if I was able. I *am* able."

"I don't see why a woman should leave to any man what she's able to do for herself!" said Kirsty, as if communing with her own thoughts.—"Francie, you are no gentleman; you are a scoundrel and a coward!" she immediately added aloud.

"Very well," returned Francis angrily; "since you choose to be treated as a man, and tell me I am no gentleman, I tell you I wouldn't marry the girl if the two of you went on your knees to me!—A common, silly, country-bred flirt!—ready for anything a man——"

Kirsty's whip descended upon him with a merciless lash. The hiss of it, as it cut the air with all the force of her strong arm, startled her mare, and

she sprang aside, so that Kirsty, who, leaning forward, had thrown the strength of her whole body into the blow, could not but lose her seat. But it was only to stand upright on her feet, fronting her—call him enemy, antagonist, victim, what you will. Gordon was grasping his head: the blow had for a moment blinded him. She gave him another stinging cut across the hands.

"That's frae yer father! The whip was his, and his swoord never did fairer wark!" she said. "—I hae dune for him what I cud!" she added in a low sorrowful voice, and stepped back, as having fulfilled her mission.

He rushed at her with a sudden torrent of evil words. But he was no match for her in agility, as, I am almost certain, he would have proved none in strength had she allowed him to close with her: she avoided him as she had more than once *jinkit* a charging bull, every now and then dealing him another sharp blow from his father's whip. The treatment began to bring him to his senses.

"For God's sake, Kirsty," he cried, ceasing his attempts to lay hold of her, "behaud, or we'll hae the haill hoose oot, and what'll come o' me than I daurna think! I doobt I'll never hear the last o' 't as 'tis!"

"Am I to trust ye, Francie?"

"I winna lay a finger upo ye, damn ye!" he said in mingled wrath and humiliation.

Throughout, Kirsty had held her mare by the bridle, and she, although behaving as well as she could, had, in the fright the laird's rushes and the sounds of the whip caused her, added not a little to

her mistress' difficulties. Just as she sprang on her back, the door opened, and faces looked peering out; whereupon with a cut or two she encouraged a few wild gambols, so that all the trouble seemed to have been with the mare. Then she rode quietly through the gate.

Gordon stood in a motionless fury until he heard the soft thunder of the mare's hoofs on the turf as Kirsty rode home at a fierce gallop; then he turned and went into the house, not to communicate what had taken place, but to lie about it as like truth as he might find possible.

About half-way home, on the side of a hill, across which a low wind, the long death-moan of autumn, blew with a hopeless, undulant, but not intermittent wail among the heather, Kirsty broke into a passionate fit of weeping, but ere she reached home, all traces of her tears had vanished.

Gordon did not go the next day, nor the day after, but he never saw Phemy again. It was a week before he showed himself, and then he was not a beautiful sight. He attributed the one visible wale on his cheek and temple to a blow from a twig as he ran in the dusk through the shrubbery after a strange dog. Even at the castle they did not know exactly when he left it. His luggage was sent after him.

The domestics at least were perplexed as to the wale on his face until the man to whom Kirsty had spoken at the door hazarded a conjecture or two, which being not far from the truth, and as such accepted, the general admiration and respect which already haloed Corbyknowe's Kirsty, were thenceforward mingled with a little wholesome fear.

When Kirsty told her father and mother what she had done at Castle Weelset, neither said a word. Her mother turned her head away, but the light in her father's eyes, had she had any doubt as to how they would take it, would have put her quite at her ease.

CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS GORDON'S CHAMPION

Poor little Phemy was in bed, and had cried herself asleep. Kirsty was more tired than she had ever been before. She went to bed at once, but, for a long time, not to sleep.

She had no doubt her parents approved of the chastisement she had given Gordon, and she herself nowise repented of it; yet the instant she lay down, back came the same sudden something that set her weeping on the hill-side. As then, all unsent-for, the face of Francie Gordon, such as he was in their childhood, rose before her, but marred by her hand with stripes of disgrace from his father's whip; and with the vision came again the torrent of her tears, for, if his father had then struck him so, she would have been bold in his defence. She pressed her face into the pillow lest her sobs should be heard. She was by no means a young woman ready to weep, but the thought of the boy-face with her blows upon it got within her guard, and ran her through the heart. It seemed as if nevermore would she escape the imagined sight. It is a sore thing when a woman, born a protector, has for protection to become an avenger, and severe was the revulsion in Kirsty from an act of violence foreign to the whole habit, though nowise inconsistent with the character, of the calm, thought-

ful woman. She had never struck even the one-horned cow that would, for very cursedness, kick over the milk-pail! Hers was the wrath of the mother, whose very presence in a calm soul is its justification —for how could it be there but by the original energy? The wrath was gone, and the mother soul turned against itself—not in judgment at all, but in irrepressible feeling. She did not for one moment think, I repeat, that she ought not to have done it, and she was glad in her heart to know that what he had said and she had done must keep Phemy and him apart; but there was the blow on the face of the boy she had loved, and there was the reflex wound in her own soul! Surely she loved him yet with her mother-love, else how could she have been angry enough with him to strike him! For weeks the pain lasted keen, and it was ever after ready to return. It was a human type of the divine suffering in the discipline of the sinner, which with some of the old prophets takes the shape of God's repenting of the evils he has brought on his people; and was the only trouble she ever kept from her mother: she feared to wake her own pain in the dearer heart. She could have told her father; for, although he was, she knew, just as loving as her mother, he was not so soft-hearted, and would not, she thought, distress himself too much about an ache more or less in a heart that had done its duty; but as she could not tell her mother, she would not tell her father. But her father and mother saw that a change had passed upon her, and partially, if not quite, understood the nature of it. They perceived that she left behind her on that night a measure of her gayety, that thereafter she was yet

gentler to her parents, and if possible yet tenderer to her brother.

For all the superiority constantly manifested by her in her relations with Francis, the feeling was never absent from her that he was of a race above her own; and now the visage of the young officer in her father's old regiment never, any more than that of her playfellow, rose in her mind's eye uncrossed by the livid mark of her whip from the temple down the cheek! Whether she had actually seen it so, she did not certainly remember, but so it always came to her, and the face of the man never cost her a tear; it was only that of the boy that made her weep.

Another thing distressed her even more: the instant ere she struck the first, the worst blow, she saw on his face an expression so meanly selfish that she felt as if she hated him. That expression had vanished from her visual memory, her whip had wiped it away, but she knew that for a moment she had all but hated him—if it was indeed *all but!*

All the house was careful the next morning that Phemy should not be disturbed; and when at length the poor child appeared, looking as if her color was not "ingrain," and so had been washed out by her tears, Kirsty made haste to get her a nice breakfast, and would answer none of her questions until she had made a proper meal.

"Noo, Kirsty," said Phemy at last, "ye maun tell me what he said whan ye loot him ken 'at I cudna win til him 'cause ye wudna lat me!"

"He saidna muckle to that. I dinna think he had been sair missin ye."

"I see ye're no gaein to tell me the trowth,

Kirsty! I ken by mysel he maun hae been missin me dreidfu'!"

"Ye can jeedge nae man by yersel, Phemy. Men's no like hiz lass-fowk!"

Phemy laughed superior.

"What ken ye aboot men, Kirsty? There never cam a man near ye, i' the w'y o' makin up til ye!"

"I'm no preten'in to ony exparience," returned Kirsty; "I wad only hae ye tak coonsel wi' common sense. Is't likly, Phemy, 'at a man wi' gran' relations, and gran' notions, a man wi' a fouth o' grit leddies in's acquantance to mak a fule o' him and themsel's thegither, special noo 'at he's an offisher i' the Company's service—is't onygait likly, I say, 'at he sud be as muckle te'en up wi' a wee bit cuintry lassie as she cudna but be wi' him?"

"Noo, Kirsty, ye jist needna gang aboot to gar me mistrust ane wha's the verra mirror o' a' knichtly coortesy," rejoined Phemy, speaking out of the high-flown, thin atmosphere she thought the region of poetry, "for ye canna! Naething ever onybody said cud gar me think different o' *him!*"

"Nor naething ever he said himsel?" asked Kirsty.

"Naething," answered Phemy, with strength and decision.

"No gien it was 'at naething wud ever gar him merry ye?"

"That he micht weel say, for he winna need garrin! —But he never said it, and ye needna try to threpe it upo' me!" she added, in a tone that showed the very idea too painful.

"He did say't, Phemy."

"Wha tellt ye? It's lees! Somebody's leein!"

"He said it til me himsel. Never a lee has onybody had a chance o' puttin intil the tale!"

"He never said it, Kirsty!" cried Phemy, her cheeks now glowing, now pale as death. "He daurna!"

"He daured; and he daured to *me!* He said, 'I wudna merry her gien baith o' ye gaed doon upon yer knees to me!'"

"Ye maun hae sair angert him, Kirsty, or he wudna hae said it! Of coorse he wasna to be guidit by you! He *cudna* hae meaned what he said! He wad never hae said it to me! I wuss wi' a' my hert I hadna latten ye til 'im! Ye hae ruined a'!"

"Ye never loot me gang, Phemy! It was my business to gang."

"I see what's intil't!" cried Phemy, bursting into tears. "Ye tellt him hoo little ye thoucht o' me, and that gart him change his min'!"

"Wud he be worth greitin aboot gien that war the case, Phemy? But ye ken it wasna that! Ye ken 'at I jist cudna du onything o' the sort!—I'm jist ashamed to deny't!"

"Hoo am I to ken? There's nae a wuman born but wad fain hae him til hersel!"

Kirsty held her peace for pity, thinking what she could say to convince her of Gordon's faithlessness.

"He didna say he hadna promised?" resumed Phemy through her sobs.

"We camna upo that."

"That's what I'm thinkin!"

"I kenna what ye're thinking, Phemy!"

"What did ye gie him, Kirsty, whan he tauld ye—

no 'at I believe a word o' 't—'at he wud nane o' me?"

Kirsty laughed with a scorn none the less clear that it was quiet.

"Jist a guid lickin," she answered.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Phemy hysterically. "I tellt ye ye was leein! Ye hae been naething but leein—a' for fun, of coorse, I ken that—to mak a fule o' me for being fleyt!"

Despair, for a moment, seemed to overwhelm Kirsty. Was it for this she had so wounded her own soul! How was she to make the poor child understand? She lifted up her heart in silence. At last she said,—

"Ye winna see mair o' him this year or twa onygait, I'm thinkin! Gien ever ye get a scart o' 's pen, it'll surprise me. But gien ever ye hae the chance, which may God forbid, tell him I said I had gien him his licks, and daured him to come and deny't to my face. He winna du that, Phemy! He kens ower weel I wad jist gie him them again!"

"He wud kill ye, Kirsty! *You* gie him his licks!"

"He micht kill me, but he'd hae a pairt o' his licks first!—And noo gien ye dinna believe me I winna answer a single question mair ye put to me. I hae been tellin ye—no God's trowth, it's true, but the deevil's—and it's no use, for ye winna believe a word o' 't!"

Phemy rose up a pygmy Fury.

"And ye laid han' to cheek o' that king o' men, Kirsty Barclay? Lord, haud me ohn killt her! Little hauds me frae rivin ye to bits wi' my twa han's!"

"I laidna han' to cheek o' Francie Gordon, Phemy;

I jist throosh him wi' his father's ain ridin-whup 'at my hert's like to brak to think o' 't. I doobt he'll carry the marks til's grave!"

Kirsty broke into a convulsion of silent sobs and tears.

"Kirsty Barclay, ye're a deevil!" cried Phemy in a hoarse whisper: she was spent with passion.

The little creature stood before Kirsty, her hands clenched and shaking with rage, blue flashes darting about in her eyes. Kirsty, at once controlling the passion of her own heart, sat still as a statue, regarding her with a sad pity. A sparrow stood chattering at a big white brooding dove; and the dove sorrowed for the sparrow, but did not know how to help the fluttering thing.

"Lord!" cried Phemy, "I'll be cursin a' the warl and God himsel, gien I gang on this gait!—Eh, ye fause wuman!"

Kirsty sprang upon her at one bound from her seat, threw her arms round her so that she could not move hers, and sitting down with her on her lap, said—

"Phemy, gien I was yer mither, I wad gie ye yer licks for sayin what ye didna i' yer hert believe! A' the time ye was keepin company wi' Francie Gordon, ye ken i' yer ain sowl ye was never richt sure o' him! And noo I tell ye plainly that, although I strack him times and times wi' my whup—and saired him weel!—I div not believe him sae ill-contrived as ye wad gar me think him. Him and me was bairns thegither, and I ken the natur o' him, and tak his pairt again ye, for, oot o' pride and ambition, ye're an enemy til him: I div not believe ever he promised to merry

ye! He's behaved ill eneuch wantin that—lattin a gowk o' a lassie like you believe what ye likit, and him only carryin on wi' ye for the ploy o' 't, haein naething to du, and sick o' his ain toom heid and still toomer hert; but a man's word's his word, and Francie's no sae ill as your tale wud mak him! There, Phemy, I hae said my say!"

She loosened her arms. But Phemy lay still, and putting her arms round Kirsty's neck, wept in a bitter silence.

CHAPTER XX

MUTUAL MINISTRATION

In a minute or so, the door opened, and Steenie coming one step into the kitchen, stood and stared with such a face of concern that Kirsty was obliged to speak. I do not believe he had ever before seen a woman weeping. He shivered visibly.

"Phemy's no that weel," she said. "Her hert's sae sair it gars her greit. She canna help greitin, puir dauty!"

Phemy lifted her face from Kirsty's bosom, where, like a miserable child, she had been pressing it hard, and, seeming to have lost in the depth of her grief all its natural shyness, looked at Steenie with the most pitiful look ever countenance wore: her rage had turned to self-commiseration. The cloud of mingled emotion and distress on the visage of Steenie wavered, shifted, changed, and settled into the divinest look of pity and protection. Kirsty said she never saw anything so unmistakably Godlike upon human countenance. Involuntarily she murmured, "Eh, the bonny man!" He turned away from them, and, his head bent upon his breast, stood for a time utterly motionless. Even Phemy, overpowered and stilled by that last look he cast upon her, gazed at him with involuntary reverence. But only Kirsty knew that the half-witted had sought and found

audience with the Eternal, and was now in his presence.

He remained in this position, Kirsty thought about three minutes. Then he lifted his head, and walked straight from the house, nor turned nor spoke. Kirsty did not go after him: she feared to tread on holy ground uninvited. Nor would she leave Phemy until her mother came.

She got up, set the poor girl on the chair, and began to get ready the mid-day meal, hoping Phemy would help her, and gain some comfort from activity. Nor was she disappointed. With a childish air of abstraction, Phemy rose and began, as of old in the house, to busy herself, and Kirsty felt much relieved.

"But, oh," she said to herself, "the sairness o' that wee herty i' the inside o' her!"

Phemy never spoke, and went about her work mechanically. When at length Mrs. Barclay came into the kitchen, Kirsty thought it better to leave them together, and went to find Steenie. She spent the rest of the day with him. Neither said a word about Phemy, but Steenie's countenance shone all the afternoon, and she left him at night in his house on the Horn, still in the after-glow of the mediation which had irradiated him in the morning.

When she came home, Kirsty found that her mother had put Phemy to bed. The poor child had scarcely spoken all day, and seemed to have no life in her. In the evening an attack of shivering, with other symptoms, showed she was physically ill. Mrs. Barclay had sent for her father, but the girl was asleep when he came. Aware that he would not hear a word casting doubt on his daughter's discre-

tion, and fearing therefore that, if she told him how she came to be there, he would take her home at any risk, where she would not be so well cared for as at the Knowe, she had told him nothing of what had taken place; and he, thinking her ailment would prove but a bad cold, had gone back to his books without seeing her. At Mrs. Barclay's entreaty he had promised to send the doctor, but never thought of it again.

Kirsty found her very feverish, breathing with difficulty, and in considerable pain. She sat by her through the night. She had seen nothing of illness, but sympathetic insight is the first essential endowment of a good nurse.

All the night long—and Kirsty knew he was near —Steenie was roving within sight of the window where the light was burning. He did not know that Phemy was ill; pity for her heart-ache drew him thither. As soon as he thought his sister would be up, he went in: the door was never locked. She heard him, and came to him. The moment he learned Phemy's condition, he said he would go for the doctor. Kirsty in vain begged him to have some breakfast first: he took a piece of oatcake in his hand and went.

The doctor returned with him, and pronounced the attack pleurisy. Phemy did not seem to care what became of her. She was ill a long time, and for a fortnight the doctor came every day.

There was now so much to be done that Kirsty could seldom go with Steenie to the hill. Nor did Steenie himself care to go for any time, and was never a night from the house. When all were in bed,

he would generally coil himself on a bench by the kitchen-fire, at any moment ready to answer the lightest call of Kirsty, who took pains to make him feel himself useful, as indeed he was. Although now he slept considerably better at night and less in the day, he would start to his feet at the slightest sound, like the dog he had almost ceased to imagine himself except in his dreams. In carrying messages, or in following directions, he had always shown himself perfectly trustworthy.

Slowly, very slowly, Phemy recovered. But long before she was well, his family saw that the change for the better which had been evident in Steenie's mental condition for some time before Phemy's illness, was now manifesting itself plainly in his person. The intense compassion which, that memorable morning, roused his spirit even to the glorifying of his visage, seemed now settling in his looks and clarifying them. His eyes appeared to shine less from his brain, and more from his mind; he stood more erect; and, as encouraging a symptom, perhaps, as any, he had grown more naturally conscious of his body and its requirements. Kirsty, coming upon him one morning as he somewhat ruefully regarded his trousers, suggested a new suit, and was delighted to see his face shine up, and hear him declare himself ready to go with her and be measured for it. She found also soon after, to her joy, that he had for some time been enlarging with hammer and chisel a certain cavity in one of the rocks inside his house on the Horn, that he might use it for a bath.

In all these things she saw evident signs of a new

start in the growth of his spiritual nature; and if she spied danger ahead, she knew that the God whose presence in him was making him grow, was ahead with the danger also.

Steenie not only now went attired as befitted David Barclay's son, but to an ordinary glance would have appeared nowise remarkable. Kirsty ceased to look upon him with the pity hitherto coloring all her devotion; pride had taken its place, which she buttressed with a massive hope, for Kirsty was a splendid hoper. People in the town, where now he was oftener seen, would remark on the wonderful change in him.—"What's come to fule Steenie?" said one of a group he had just passed, "Haith he's luikin 'maist like ither fowk!"—"I'm thinkin the deevil maun hae gang oot o' him!" said another, and several joined in with their remarks.—"Nae muckle o' a deevil was there to gang oot! He was aye an unco hairmless cratur!"—"And that saft-hertit til a' leevin thing!"—"He was that! I saw him ance face a score o' laddies to proteck a poddick they war puttin to torment, whan, the Lord kens, he had need o' a' his wits to tak care o' himsel!"—"Aye, jist like him!"—"Weel, the Lord taks care o' him, for he's ane o' his ain innocents!"

Kirsty, before long, began to teach him to sit on a horse, and, after but a few weeks of her training, he could ride pretty well.

It was many weeks before Phemy was fit to go home. Her father came to see her now and then, but not very often: he had his duties to attend to, and his books consoled him.

As soon as Phemy was able to leave her room,

Steenie constituted himself her slave, and was ever within her call. He seemed always to know when she would prefer having him in sight, and when she would rather be alone. He would sit for an hour at the other end of the room, and watch her like a dog without moving. He could have sat so all day, but, as soon as she was able to move about, nothing could keep Phemy in one place more than an hour at the utmost. By this time Steenie could read a little, and his reading was by no means as fruitless as it was slow: he would sit reading, nor at all lose his labor that, every other moment when within sight of her, he would look up to see if she wanted anything. To this mute attendance of love the girl became so accustomed that she regarded it as her right, nor had ever the spoiled little creature occasion to imagine that it was not yielded her; and if at a rare moment she threw him glance or small smile—a crumb from her table to her dog—Steenie would for one joyous instant see into the seventh heaven, and all the day after dwell in the fifth or sixth. On fine clear noontides she would walk a little way with him and Snootie, and then he would talk to her as he had never done except to Kirsty, telling her wonderful things about the dog and the sheep, the stars and the night, the clouds and the moon; but he never spoke to her of the bonny man. When, on their return, she would say they had had a pleasant walk together, his delight would be unutterable; but all the time Steenie had not once ventured a word belonging to any of the deeper thoughts in which his heart was most at home. Was it that in his own eyes he was

but a worm glorified with the boon of serving an angel? was it that he felt as if she knew everything of that kind, and he had nothing to tell her but the things that entered at his eyes and ears? or was it that a sacred instinct of her incapacity for holy things kept him silent concerning such? At times he would look terribly sad, and the mood would last for hours.

Not once since she began to get better, had Phemy alluded to her faithless lover. In its departure her illness seemed to have carried with it her unwholesome love for him; and certainly, as if overjoyed at her deliverance, she had become much more of a child. Kirsty was glad for her sake, and gladder still that Francie Gordon had done her no irreparable injury—seemed not even to have left his simulacrum in her memory and imagination. As her strength returned, she regained the childish merriment which had always drawn Kirsty, and the more strongly that she was not herself light-hearted. Kirsty's rare laugh was indeed a merry one, but when happiest of all she hardly smiled. Perhaps she never would laugh her own laugh until she opened her eyes in heaven! But how can any one laugh his real best before that! Until then he does not even know his name!

Phemy seemed more pleased to see her father every time he came; and Kirsty began to hope she would tell him the trouble she had gone through. But then Kirsty had a perfect faith in her father, and a girl like Phemy never has! Her father, besides, had never been father enough to her. He had been invariably kind and trusting, but his books had

been more to his hourly life than his daughter. He had never drawn her to him, never given her opportunity of coming really near him. No story, however, ends in this world. The first volume may have been very dull, and yet the next be full of delight.

CHAPTER XXI

PHEMY YIELDS PLACE

It was the last week in November when the doctor came himself to take Phemy home to her father. The day was bright and blue, with a thin carpet of snow on the ground, beneath which the roads were in good condition. While she was getting ready, old David went out and talked to the doctor who would not go in, his wrinkled face full of light, and his heart glad with the same gladness as Kirsty's.

Mrs. Barclay and Kirsty busied themselves about Phemy, who was as playful and teasing as a pet kitten while they dressed her, but Steenie kept in the darkest corner, watching everything, but offering no unneeded help. Without once looking or asking for him, never missing him in fact, Phemy climbed, with David's aid, into the gig beside the doctor, at once began talking to him, and never turned her head as they drove away. The moment he heard the sound of the horse's hoofs, Steenie came quietly from the gloom and went out of the back-door, thinking no eye was upon him. But his sister's heart was never off him, and her eyes were oftener on him than he knew.

Of late he had begun again to go to the hill at night, and Kirsty feared his old trouble might be returning. Glad as she was to serve Phemy, and the father through the daughter, she was far from re-

gretting her departure, for now she would have leisure for Steenie and her books, and now the family would gather itself once more into the perfect sphere to which drop and ocean alike desires to shape itself!

"I thoucht ye wud be efter me!" cried Steenie, as she opened the door of his burrow, within an hour of his leaving the house.

Now Kirsty had expected to find him full of grief because of Phemy's going, especially as the heartless girl, for such Steenie's sister could not help thinking her, never said good-by to her most loving slave. And she did certainly descry on his countenance traces of emotion, and in his eyes the lingering trouble as of a storm all but over blown. There was however in his face the light as of a far sunk aurora, the outmost rim of whose radiance, doubtfully visible, seemed to encircle his whole person. He was not lost in any gloom! She sat down beside him, and waited for him to speak.

Never doubting she would follow him, he had already built up a good peat-fire on the hearth, and placed for her beside it a low settle which his father had made for him, and he had himself covered with a sheepskin of thickest fleece. They sat silent for a while.

"Wud ye say noo, Kirsty, 'at I was ony use til her?" he asked at length.

"Jist a heap," answered Kirsty. "I kenna what ever she or I wud hae dune wantin ye! She nott (*needed*) a heap o' luikin til!"

"And ye think mebbe she'll be some the better, some w'y or ither, for't?"

"Ay, I div think that, Steenie. But to tell the

trowth, I'm no sure she'll think verra aft aboot what ye did for her!"

"Ow, na! What for sud she? There's no need for that! It was for hersel, no for her think-aboot-it, I tried. I was jist fain to du something like wash the feet o' her. Whan I cam in that day—the day efter ye broucht her hame, ye ken—the luik of her puir, bonny, begrutten facy, jist turnt my hert ower i' the mids o' me. I maist think, gien I hadna been able to du onything for her afore she gaed, I wud hae come hame here to my ain hoose like a deein sheep, and lain doon. Yon face o' hers comes back til me noo like the face o' a lost lammie 'at the shepherd didna think worth gaein oot to luik for. But gien I had sic a sair hert for her, the bonny man maun hae had a sairer, and he'll du for her what he can—and that maun be muckle—muckle! They ca' 'im the gude shepherd, ye ken!"

He sat silent for some minutes, and Kirsty's heart was too full to let her speak. She could only say to herself—"And folk ca's him half-wuttit, div they! Weel, lat them! Gien he be half-wuttit, the Lord's made up the ither half wi better!"

"Ay!" resumed Steenie, "the gude shepherd tynes (*loses*) no ane o' them a'! But I'll miss her dreidfu! Eh, but I likit to watch the wan bit facy grow and grow till't was roon' and rosy again! And, eh, sic a bonny reid and white as it was! And better yet I likit to see yon hert-brakin luik o' the lost ane weirin aye awa and awa till't was clean gane!—And noo she's back til her father, bricht and licht and bonny as the lown starry nicht!— Eh, but it maks me happy to think o' 't!"

"Sae it maks me!" responded Kirsty, feeling, as she regarded him, like a glorified mother beholding her child walking in the truth.

"And noo," continued Steenie, "I'm richt glaid she's gane, and my min' 'll be mair at ease gien I tell ye what for:—I maun aye tell you a'thing 'at'll bide tellin, Kirsty, ye ken!—Weel, a week or twa ago, I began to be troubled as I never was troubled afore. I canna weel say what was the cause o' 't, or the kin' o' thing it was, but something had come that I didna want to come, and couldna keep awa. Maybe ye'll ken what it was like whan I tell ye 'at I was aye think-thinkin aboot Phemy. Noo, afore she cam, I was maist aye thinkin aboot the bonny man; and it wasna that there was ony sic necessity for thinkin aboot Phemy, for by that time she was oot o' her meesery, whatever that was, or whatever had the wyte (*blame*) o' 't. I' the time afore her, whan my min' wud grow a bit quaiet, and the pooers o' darkness wud draw themsels awa a bit, aye wud come the face o' the bonny man intil the toom place, and fill me fresh up wi' the houp o' seein him or lang; but noo, at ilka moment, up wud come, no the face o' the bonny man, but the face o' Phemy; and I didna like that, and I cudna help it. And a scraichin fear grippit me, 'at I was turnin fause to the bonny man. It wisna that I thoucht he wud be vext wi' me, but that I cudna bide onything to come atween me and him. I teuk mysel weel ower the heckles, but I cudna mak oot 'at I cud a'thegither help it. Ye see, somehoo, no bein made a'thegither like ither fowk, I cudna think aboot twa things at ance, and I bude to think aboot the ane that cam o' 'tsel like. But, as

I say, it troubled me. Weel, the day, my hert was sair at her gangin awa, for I had been lang used to seein her ilka hoor, maist ilka minute; and the ae wuss i' my hert at the time was to du something worth duin for her, and syne dee and hae dune wi 't—and there, I doobt, I clean forgot the bonny man! Whan she got intil the doctor's gig and awa they drave, my hert grew cauld; I was like ane deid and beginnin to rot i' the grave. But that minute I h'ard, or it was jist as gien I h'ard—I dinna mean wi' my lugs, but i' my hert, ye ken—a v'ice cry, 'Steenie! Steenie!' and I cried lood oot, 'Comin, Lord!' but I kent weel eneuch the v'ice was inside o' me, and no i' my heid, but i' my hert—and nane the less i' me for that! Sae awa at ance I cam to my closet here, and sat doon, and hearkent i' the how o' my hert. Never a word cam, but I grew quaiet—eh, sae quaiet and content like wi'oot onything to mak me sae, but maybe 'at he was thinkin aboot me! And I'm quaiet yet. And as sune's it's dark, I s' gang oot and see whether the bonny man be onywhaur aboot. There's naething atween him and me noo; for, the moment I begin to think, it's him 'at comes to be thoucht aboot, and no Phemy ony mair!"

"Steenie," said Kirsty, "it was the bonny man sent Phemy til ye—to gie ye something to du for him, luikin efter ane o' his silly lambs."

"Ay," returned Steenie; "I ken she wasna wise-like, sic as you and my mither. She needit a heap o' luikin efter, as ye said."

"And wi' haein to luik efter her, he kenned that the thouchts that troubled ye wudna sae weel win in, and wud learn to bide oot. Jist luik at ye noo! See

hoo ye hae learnt to luik efter yersel! Ye saw it cudna be agreeable to her to hae ye aboot her no that weel washed, and wi' claes ye didna keep tidy and clean! Sin ever ye tuik to luikin efter Phemy, I hae had little trouble luikin efter you!"

"I see't, Kirsty, I see't! I never thoucht o' the thing afore! I micht du a heap to mak mysel mair like ither fowk! I s' no forget, noo 'at I hae gotten a grip o' the thing. Ye'll see, Kirsty!"

"That's my ain Steenie!" answered Kirsty. "Maybe the bonny man cudna be aye comin to ye himsel, haein ither fowk a heap to luik til, and sae sent Phemy to lat ye ken what he would hae o' ye. Noo 'at ye hae begun, ye'll be growin mair and mair like ither fowk."

"Eh, but ye fleg me! I may grow ower like ither fowk! I maun awa oot, Kirsty! I'm growin fleyt!"

"What for, Steenie?" cried Kirsty, not a little frightened herself, and laying her hand on his arm. She feared his old trouble was returning in force.

"'Cause ither fowk never sees the bonny man, they tell me," he replied.

"That's their ain wyte," answered Kirsty. "They micht a' see him gien they wud—or at least hear him say they sud see him or lang."

"Eh, but I'm no sure 'at ever I did see him, Kirsty!"

"That winna haud ye ohn seen him whan the hoor comes. And the like's true o' the lave."

"Ay, for I canna du wantin him—and sae nouther can they!"

"Naebody can. A' maun hae seen him, or be gaein to see him!"

"I hae as guid as seen him, Kirsty! He was there! He helpit me whan the ill folk cam to pu' at me!—Ye div think though, Kirsty, 'at I'm b'un' to see him some day?"

"I'm thinkin the hoor's been aye set for that same!" answered Kirsty.

"Kirsty," returned Steenie, not quite satisfied with her reply, "I'll gang clean oot the wuts I hae, gien ye tell me I'm never to see him face to face!"

"Steenie," rejoined Kirsty solemnly, "I wud gang oot o' my wuts mysel gien I didna believe that! I believe 't wi' a' my heart, my bonny man."

"Weel, and that's a' richt! But ye maunna ca' me yer bonny man, Kirsty; for there's but ae bonny man, and we're a' brithers and sisters. He said it himsel!"

"That's verra true, Steenie; but whiles ye're sae like him I canna help ca'in ye by his name."

"Dinna du't again, Kirsty. I canna bide it. I'm no bonny! No but I wud sair like to be bonny—bonny like him, Kirsty!—Did ye ever hear tell 'at he had a father? I h'ard a man ance say 'at he hed. Sic a bonny man as that father maun be! Jist think o' his haein a son like *him!*—Dauvid Barclay maun be richt sair disappintit wi' sic a son as me—and him sic a man himsel! What for is't, Kirsty?"

"That'll be ane o' the secrets the bonny man's gaein to tell his ain fowk whan he gets them hame wi' him!"

"His ain fowk, Kirsty?"

"Ay, siclike's you and me. Whan we gang hame, he'll tell 's a' aboot a heap o' things we wad fain ken."

"His ain fowk! His ain fowk!" Steenie went on for a while murmuring to himself at intervals. At last he said,

"What maks them his ain fowk, Kirsty?"

"What maks me your fowk, Steenie?" she rejoined.

"That's easy to tell. It's 'cause we hae the same father and mither; I hae aye kenned that!" answered Steenie with a laugh.

She had been trying to puzzle him, he thought, but had failed!

"Weel, the bonny man and you and me, we hae a' the same father: that's what maks us his ain fowk! —Ye see noo?"

"Ay, I see! I see!" responded Steenie, and again was silent.

Kirsty thought he had plenty now to meditate upon.

"Are ye comin hame wi' me," she asked, "or are ye gaein to bide, Steenie?"

"I'll gang hame wi' ye, gien ye like, but I wud raither bide the nicht," he answered. "I'll hae jist this ae nicht mair oot upo' the hill, and syne the morn I'll come hame to the hoose, and see gien I can help my mither, or maybe my father. That's what the bonny man wud like best, I'm sure."

Kirsty went home with a glad heart: surely Steenie was now in a fair way of becoming, as he phrased it, "like ither fowk!"

"But the Lord's gowk's better nor the warl's prophet!" she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HORN

THE beginning of the winter had been open and warm, and very little snow had fallen. This was much in Phemy's favor, and by the new year she was quite well. But, notwithstanding her heartlessness toward Steenie, she was no longer quite like her old self. She was quieter—and less foolish; she had had a lesson in folly, and a long ministration of love, and knew now a trifle about both. It is true she wrote nearly as much silly poetry, but it was not so silly as before, partly because her imagination had now something of fact to go upon, and poorest fact is better than mere fancy. So free was her heart, however, that she went of herself to see her aunt at the castle, to whom, having beheld the love between David and his daughter, and begun to feel injured by the little notice her father took of her, she bewailed his indifference.

At Mrs. Bremner's request she had made an appointment to go with her from the castle on a certain Saturday to visit a distant relative, living in a lonely cottage on the other side of the Horn—a woman too old ever to leave her home. When the day arrived, both saw that the weather gave signs of breaking, but the heavy clouds on the horizon seemed no worse than had often shown themselves that winter, and as

often passed away. The air was warm, the day bright, the earth dry, and Phemy and her aunt were in good spirits. They had purposed to return early to Weelset, but agreed as they went that Phemy, the days being so short, should take the nearer path to Tiltowie, over the Horn. By this arrangement, their visit ended, they had no great distance to walk together, Mrs. Bremner's way lying along the back of the hill, and Phemy's over the nearer shoulder of it.

As they took leave of each other, a little later than they had intended, Mrs. Bremner cast a glance at the gathering clouds, and said,

"I doobt, lassie, it's gaein to ding on afore the nicht! I wuss we war hame the twa o' 's! Gien it cam on to snaw and blaw baith, we micht hae ill winnin there!"

"Noucht's to fear, auntie," returned Phemy. "It's a heap ower warm to snaw. It may rain—I wudna won'er, but there'll be nae snaw—no afore I win hame, onygait."

"Weel, min', gien there be ae drap o' weet, ye maun change ilka stic the minute ye're i' the hoose. Ye're no that stoot yet!"

"I'll be sure, auntie!" answered Phemy, and they parted almost at a right angle.

Before Phemy got to the top of the hill-shoulder, which she had to cross by a path no better than a sheep-track, the wind had turned to the north, and was blowing keen, with gathering strength, from the regions of everlasting ice, bringing with it a cold terrible to be faced by such a slight creature as Phemy; and so rapidly did its force increase that in a few minutes she had to fight for every step she

took; so that, when at length she reached the top, which lay bare to the continuous torrent of fierce and fiercer rushes, her strength was already all but exhausted. The wind brought up heavier and heavier snow-clouds, and darkness with them, but before ever the snow began to fall, Phemy was in evil case—in worse case, indeed, than she could know. In a few minutes the tempest had blown all energy out of her, and she sat down where was not a stone to shelter her. When she rose, afraid to sit longer, she could no more see the track through the heather than she could tell without it in which direction to turn. She began to cry, but the wind did not heed her tears; it seemed determined to blow her away. And now came the snow, filling the wind faster and faster, until at length the frightful blasts had in them, perhaps, more bulk of blinding and dizzying snow-flakes than of the air which drove them. They threatened between them to fix her there in a pillar of snow. It would have been terrible indeed for Phemy on that waste hill-side, but that the cold and the tempest speedily stupefied her.

Kirsty always enjoyed the winter heartily. For one thing, it roused her poetic faculty—oh, how different in its outcome from Phemy's!—far more than the summer. That very afternoon, leaving Steenie with his mother, she paid a visit to the weem, and there, in the heart of the earth, made the following little song, addressed to the sky-soaring lark:—

What gars ye sing sae, birdie,
As gien ye war lord o' the lift?
On breid ye're an unco sma' lairdie,
But in hicht ye've a kingly gift!

A' ye hae to count yersel rich in,
'S a wee mawn o' glory-motes!
The whilk to the throne ye're aye hitchin
Wi' a lang tow o' sapphire notes!

Ay, yer sang's the sang o' an angel
For a sinfu' thrapple no meet,
Like the pipes til a heavenly braingel
Whaur they dance their herts intil their feet!

But though ye canna behaud, birdie,
Ye needna gar a'thing wheesht!
I'm noucht but a hirplin herdie,
But I hae a sang i' my breist!

Len' me yer throat to sing throuw,
Len' me yer wings to gang hie,
And I'll sing ye a sang a laverock to cow,
And for bliss to gar him dee!

Long before she had finished writing it, the world was dark outside. She had heard but little heeded the roaring of the wind over her: when at length she put her head up out of the earth, it seized her by the hair as if it would drag it off. It took her more than an hour to get home.

In the mean time Steenie had been growing restless. Coming wind often affected him so. He had been out with his father, who expected a storm, to see that all was snug about byres and stables, and feed the few sheep in an outhouse; now he had come in, and was wandering about the house, when his mother prevailed on him to sit down by the fireside with her. The clouds had gathered thick, and the afternoon was very dark, but all was as yet still. He called his dog, and Snootie lay down at his feet, ready for what might come. Steenie sat on a stool, with his

head on his mother's knee, and for a while seemed lost in thought. Then, without moving or looking up, he said, as if thinking aloud,—

"It maun be fine fun up there amang thae cloods afore the flauks begin to spread!"

"What mean ye by that, Steenie, my man?" asked his mother.

"They maun be packit sae close, sae unco close i' their muckle pocks, like the feathers in a feather-bed! and syne, whan they lat them a' oot thegither, like haudin the bed i' their twa han's by the boddom corners, they maun be smorin thick till they begin to spread!"

"And wha think ye shaks oot the muckle pocks, Steenie?"

"I dinna ken. I hae aften thoucht aboot it. I dinna think it's likly to be the angels. It's mair like wark for the bairnies up yoner at the muckle ferm at hame, whaur ilk ane, to the littlest littlin, kens what he's aboot, and no ane o' them's like some o' 's doon here, 'at gangs a' day in a dream, and canna get oorsels waukent oot o' 't. I wud be surer but that I hae thoucht whiles I saw the muckle angels themsels gaein aboot, throu and throu the ondingin flauchter o' the snaw—no mony o' them, ye ken, but jist whiles ane and whiles anither, throu amo' the cauld feathers, gaein aye straucht wi' their heids up, walkin comfortable, as gien they war at hame in't. I'm thinkin at sic a time they'll be efter helpin some puir body 'at the snaw's like to be ower muckle for. Eh me! gien I cud but get rid o' my feet, and win up to see!"

"What for yer feet, Steenie? What ails ye aye at

yer feet? Feet's gey usefu' kin o' things to craturs, whether gien them in fours or twas!"

"Ay, but mine's sic a weicht! It's them 'at's aye haudin me doon! I wad hae been up and awa lang syne gien it hadna been for them!"

"And what wud hae been comin o' hiz wantin ye, Steenie?"

"Ye wad be duin sae weel wantin me, 'at ye wud be aye wantin to be up and efter me! A body's feet's nae doobt usefu to haud a body steady, and ohn gane blawin aboot, but eh, they're unco cummarsum! But syne they're unco guid tu to haud a body ohn thoucht owre muckle o' himsel! They're fine heumblin things, a body's feet! But, eh, it'll be fine wantin them!"

"Whaur on earth gat ye sic notions aboot yer feet? Guid kens there's naething amiss wi' yer feet! Nouther o' ye hes ony rizzon to be ashamit o' yer feet. The fac is, *your* feet's by ordinar sma', Steenie, and can add but unco little to yer weicht!"

"It's a' 'at ye ken, mother!" answered Steenie with a smile. "But, 'deed, I got my information aboot the feet o' fowk frae naegate i' this warl'! The bonny man himsel sent word aboot them. He tellt the minister 'at tellt me, ance I was at the kirk wi' you, mother—lang, lang syne—twa or three hun'er years, I'm thinkin'. The bonny man tellt his ain fowk first that he was gaein awa in order that they michtna be able to do wantin him, and bude to stir themselves and come up efter him. And syne he slippit aff his feet, and gaed awa up intil the air whaur the snaw comes frae. And ever sin syne he comes and gangs as he likes. And efter that he

telled the minister to tell hiz 'at we was to lay aside the weicht that sae easy besets us, and rin. Noo by *rin* he maun hae meaned *rin up*, for a body's no to rin frae the deevil but resist him; and what is't that hauds onybody frae rinnin up the air but his feet? There!—But he's promised to help me aff wi' my feet some day: think o' that!—Eh, gien I cud but get my feet aff! Eh, gien they wad but stick i' my shune, and gang wi' them whan I pu' them aff! They're naething efter a', ye ken, but the shune o' my sowl!"

A gust of wind drove against the house, and sank as suddenly.

"That'll be ane o' them!" said Steenie, rising hastily. "He'll be wantin me! It's no that aften thay want onything o' me ayont the fair words a' God's craturs luik for frae ane anither, but whiles they do want me, and I'm thinkin they want me the nicht. I maun be gaein!"

"Hoots, laddie!" returned his mother, "what can they be wantin, thae gran' offishers, o' siclike as you? Sit ye doon, and bide till they cry ye plain. I wud fain hae ye safe i' the hoose the nicht!"

"It's a' his hoose, mother! A' theroot's therein to him. He's in's ain hoose a' the time, and I'm jist as safe atween his wa's as atween yours. Didna naebody ever tell ye that, mother? Weel, I ken it to be true! And for wantin sic like as me, gien God never has need o' a midge what for dis he mak sic a lot o' them?"

"'Deed it's true eneuch ye say!" returned his mother. "But I div won'er ye're no fleyt!"

"Fleyt!" rejoined Steenie; "what for wud I be

fleyt? What is there to be fleyt at? I never was fleyt at face o' man or wuman—na, nor o' beast naither!—I was ance, and never but that ance, fleyt at the face o' a bairn!"

"And what for that, Steenie?"

"He was rinnin efter his wee sister to lick her, and his face was the face o' a deevil. He nearhan' garred me hate him, and that wud hae been a terrible sin. But, eh, puir laddie, he hed a richt fearsome wife to the mither o' him! I'm thinkin the bonny man maun hae a heap o' tribble wi' siclike, be they bairns or mithers!"

"Eh, but ye're i' the richt there, laddie!—Noo hearken to me: ye maunna gang the nicht!" said his mother anxiously. "Gien yer father and Kirsty wad but come in to persuaud ye! I'm clean lost wi'oot them!"

"For the puir idiot hasna the sense to ken what's wantit o' him!" supplemented Steenie, with a laugh almost merry.

"Daur ye," cried his mother, indignantly, "mint at sic a word and my bairn thegither? He's my bonny man!"

"Na, mother, na! *He's* the bonny man at wha's feet I sall ae day sit, clothed and i' my richt min'. He *is* the bonny man!"

"Thank the Lord," continued his mother, still harping on the outrage of such as called her child an idiot, "'at ye're no an orphan—'at there's three o' 's to tak yer part!"

"Naebody can be an orphan," said Steenie, "sae lang's God's nae deid."

"Lord, and they ca' ye an idiot, div they!" ex-

claimed Marion Barclay. "—Weel, be ye or no, ye're ane o' the babes in wha's mooth he perfecteth praise!"

"He'll du that some day, maybe!" answered Steenie.

"But! eh, Steenie," pursued his mother, "ye winna gang the nicht!"

"Mother," he answered, "ye dinna ken, nor yet do I, what to mak o' me—what wits I hae, and what wits I haena; but this ye'll alloo, that, for onything ye ken, the bonny man may be cryin upon me to gang efter some puir little yowie o' his, oot her lane i' the storm and the nicht!"

With these words he walked gently from the kitchen, his dog following him.

A terrible blast rushed right into the fire when he opened the door. But he shut it behind him easily, and his mother comforted herself that she had known him out in worse weather. Kirsty entered a moment after, and her father came in from the loft he called his workshop, they had their tea, and sat round the fire after it, peacefully talking, a little troubled, but nowise uneasy that their Steenie, the darling of them all, was away on the Horn: he knew every foot of its sides better than the collie who, a moment ago asleep before the fire, was now following at his master's heel.

The wind, which had fallen immediately after the second gust as after the first, now began to blow with gathering force, and it took Steenie much longer than usual to make his way over height and hollow from his father's house to his own. But he was in no hurry, not knowing where he was wanted. I do not

think he met any angels as he went, but it was a pleasure to think they might be about somewhere, for they were sorry for his heavy feet, and always greeted him kindly. Not that they ever spoke to him, he said, but they always made a friendly gesture—nodding a stately head, waving a strong hand, or sending him a waft of cool air as they went by, a waft that would come to him through the fiercest hurricane as well as through the stillest calm.

Before, strong toiling against the wind, man and dog reached their refuge among the rocks, the snow had begun to fall, and the night seemed solid with blackness. The very flakes might have been black as the snow of hell for any gleam they gave. But they arrived at last, and Steenie, making Snootie go in before him, entered the low door with bent head, and closed it behind them. The dog lay down weary, but Steenie set about lighting the peats ready piled between the great stones of the hearth. The wind howled over the waste hill in multitudinous whirls, and swept like a level cataract over the ghastly bog at its foot, but scarce a puff blew against the door of their burrow.

When his fire was well alight, Steenie seated himself by it on the sheepskin settle, and fell into a reverie. How long he had sat thus he did not know, when suddenly the wind fell, and with the lull master and dog started together to their feet: was it indeed a cry they had heard, or but a moan between wind and mountain? The dog flew to the door with a whine, and began to sniff and scratch at the crack of the threshold; Steenie, thinking it was still dark, went to get a lantern Kirsty had provided him with,

but which he had never yet had occasion to use. The dog ran back to him, and began jumping upon him, indicating thus in the recess where he found him that he wanted him to open the door. A moment more and they were in the open universe, in a night all of snow, lighted by the wide swooning gleam of a hidden moon, whose radiance, almost absorbed, came filtering through miles of snow-cloud to reach the world. Nothing but snow was to be seen in heaven or earth, but for the present no more was falling. Steenie set the lighted lantern by the door, and followed Snootie, who went sniffing and snuffing about.

Steenie always regarded inferior animals, and especially dogs, as a lower sort of angels, with ways of their own, into which it would be time to inquire by and by, when either they could talk or he could bark intelligently and intelligibly—in which it used to annoy him that he had not yet succeeded. It was in part his intense desire to enter into the thoughts of his dog, that used to make him imitate him the most of the day. I think he put his body as nearly into the shape of the dog's as he could, in order thus to aid his mind in feeling as the dog was feeling.

As the dog seemed to have no scent of anything, Steenie, after considering for a moment what he must do, began to walk in a spiral, beginning from the door, with the house for the centre. He had thus got out of the little valley on to the open hill, and the wind had begun to threaten reawaking, when Snootie, who was a little way to one side of him, stopped short, and began scratching like a fury in the snow. Steenie ran to him, and dropped on his knees to help him: he had already got a part of

something clear! It was the arm of a woman. So deep was the snow over her, that the cry he and the dog had heard, could not surely have been uttered by her! He was gently clearing the snow from the head, and the snow-like features were vaguely emerging, when the wind gave a wild howl, the night grew dark again, and in bellowing blackness the death-silent snow was upon them. But in a moment or two more, with Snootie's vigorous aid, he had drawn the body of a slight, delicately formed woman out of its cold, white mould. Somehow, with difficulty, he got it on his back, the only way he could carry it, and staggered away with it toward his house. Thus laden, he might never have found it, near as it was, for he was not very strong, and the ground was very rough as well as a little deep in snow, but they had left such a recent track that the guidance of the dog was sure. The wise creature did not, however, follow the long track, but led pretty straight across the spiral for the hut.

The body grew heavy on poor Steenie's back, and the cold of it came through to his spine. It was so cold that it must be a dead thing, he thought. His breathing grew very short, compelling him, several times, to stop and rest. His legs became insensible under him, and his feet got heavier and heavier in the snow-filled entangling, impeding heather.

What if it were Phemy! he thought as he struggled on. Then he would have the beautiful thing all to himself! But this was a dead thing, he feared—only a thing; and no woman at all! Of course it couldn't be Phemy! She was at home, asleep in her father's house! He had always shrunk from death; even a

dead mouse he could not touch without a shudder; but this was a woman, and might come alive! It belonged to the bonny man, anyhow, and he would stay out with it all night rather than have it lie there alone in the snow! He would not be afraid of her: he was nearly dead himself, and the dead were not afraid of the dead! She had only put off her shoes! But she might be alive, and he must get her into the house! He would like to put off his feet, but most people would rather keep them on, and he must try to keep hers on for her!

With fast-failing energy he reached the door, staggered in, dropped his burden gently on his own soft heather-bed, and fell exhausted.

He lay but a moment, came to himself, rose, and looked at the lovely thing he had labored to redeem from "cold obstruction." It lay just as it had fallen from his back, its face uppermost: it *was* Phemy!

For a moment his blood seemed to stand still; then all the divine senses of the half-witted returned to him. There was no time to be sorrowful over her: he must serve the life that might yet be in that frozen form! He had nothing in the house except warmth, but warmth more than aught else was what the cold thing needed! With trembling hands he took off her half-thawed clothes, laid her in the thick blankets of his bed, and covered her with every woollen thing in the hut. Then he made up a large fire, in the hope that some of its heat might find her.

She showed no sign of life. Her eyes were fast shut: those who die of cold only sleep into a deeper sleep. Not a trace of suffering was to be seen on her countenance. Death alone, pure, calm, cold,

and sweet, was there. But Steenie had never seen Death, and there was room for him to doubt and hope. He laid one fold of a blanket over the lovely white face, as he had seen a mother do with a sleeping infant, called his dog, made him lie down on her feet, and told him to watch; then turned away, and went to the door. As he passed the fire, he coughed and grew faint, but recovering himself, picked up his fallen stick, and set out for Corbyknowe and Kirsty. Once more the wind had ceased, but the snow was yet falling.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STORM AGAIN

KIRSTY woke suddenly out of a deep, dreamless sleep. A white face was bending over her—Steenie's—whiter than ever Kirsty had seen it. He was panting, and his eyes were huge. She started up.

"Come; come," was all he was able to say.

"What's the metter, Steenie?" she gasped.

For a quarter of a minute he stood panting, unable to speak.

"I'm no thinkin onything's gane wrang," he faltered at length with an effort, recovering breath and speech a little. "The bonny man——"

He burst into tears, and turned his head away. A vision of the white, lovely, motionless thing, whose hand had fallen from his like a lump of lead, lying alone at the top of the Horn, with the dog on her feet, had overwhelmed him suddenly.

Kirsty was sore distressed. She dreaded the worst when she saw him thus lose the self-restraint hitherto so remarkable in him. She leaned from her bed, threw her arms round him, and drew him to her. He kneeled, laid his head on her bosom, and wept as she had never known him weep.

"I'll tak care o' ye, Steenie, my man!" she murmured. "Fear ye naething."

It is amazing how much, in the strength of its own divinity, love will dare promise!

"Ay, Kirsty, I ken ye wull, but it's no me!" said Steenie.

Thereupon he gave a brief, lucid account of what had occurred in the night.

"And noo 'at I hae telt ye," he added, "it luiks a' sae strange 'at maybe I hae been but dreamin, efter a'! But it maun be true, for that maun hae been what the angels cam cryin upo' me for. I'm thinkin they wud hae broucht me straucht til her themsels—they maistly gang aboot in twas, as whan they gaed and waukent the bonny man—gien it hadna been 'at the guid collie was aiqual to that!"

Kirsty told him to go and rouse the kitchen fire, and she would be with him in a minute. She sprang out of bed, and dressed as fast as she could, thinking what she had best take with her. "The puir lassie," she said to herself, "may be growin warm, and sleepin deith awa; and by the time we win there she'll be needin something, like the lassie 'at the Lord liftit!" But in her heart she had little hope: it would be a sad day for the schoolmaster.

She went to her father and mother's room, found them awake, and told them Steenie's tale.

"It's time we war up, wuman!" said David.

"Ay," returned his wife, "but Kirsty canna bide for's. Ye maun be aff, lassie! Tak a wee whuskey wi' ye; but min' it's no that safe wi' frozen fowk. Het milk's the best thing. Tak a drappie o' that wi' ye, I s' be efter ye wi' mair. And dinna forget a piece to uphaud ye as ye gang; it'll be ill fechtin the win'. Dinna lat Steenie gang back wi' ye; he canna

be fit. Sen' him to me, and I'll persuaud him.—David, man, ye'll hae to saiddle and ride: the doctor maun gang wi ye straucht to Steenie's hoose."

"Lat me up," said David, making a motion to free himself of the bedclothes.

Kirsty went, and got some milk to make it hot. But when she reached the kitchen, Steenie was not there, and the fire, which he had tried to wake up, was all but black. The house-door was open, and the snow drifting in. Steenie was gone into the storm again! She hurriedly poured the milk into a small bottle, and thrust it into her bosom to grow warm as she went. Then she lighted a lantern, chiefly that Steenie might catch sight of it, and set out.

She started running, certain, she thought, to overtake him. The wind was up again, but it was almost behind her, and the night was not absolutely dark for the moon was somewhere. She was far stronger than Steenie, and could walk faster, but, keen as was her outlook on all sides, for the snow was not falling too thick to let her see a little way through it, she was at length near the top of the Horn without having caught a glimpse of him. Had he dropped on the way? Had she in her haste left him after all in the house? She might have passed him: that was easy to do! One thing she was sure of—he could not have got to his house before her!

As she drew near the door she heard a short howl, and knew it for Snootie's. Perhaps Phemy had revived! But no! it was a desolate, forsaken cry! The next moment came a glad bark: was it the footstep of Kirsty it greeted, or the soul of Phemy?

With steady hand, and heart prepared, she opened the door and went in. The dog came bounding to her: either he counted himself relieved, or could bear it no longer. He cringed at her feet; he leaped upon her; he saw in her his savior from the terrible silence and cold and motionlessness. Then he stood still before her, looking up to her, and wagging his tail, but his face said plainly: *It is there!*

Kirsty hesitated a moment; a weary sense of uselessness had overtaken her, and she shrank from encountering the unchanging and unchangeable; but she cast off the oppression, and followed the dog to the bedside. He jumped up, and lay down where his master had placed him, as if to say he had been lying there all the time, and had only got up the moment she came. It was the one warm spot in all the woollen pile; the feet beneath it were cold as the snow outside, and the lovely form lay motionless as a thing that would never move again. Kirsty lifted the blanket: there was Phemy's face, blind with the white death! It did not look at her, did not recognize her: Phemy was there and not there! Phemy was far away! Phemy could not move from where she lay!

Hopeless, Kirsty yet tried her best to wake her from her snow-sleep, shrinking from nothing, except for the despair of it. But long ere she gave up the useless task, she was thinking far more about Steenie than Phemy.

He did not come! "He must be safe with his mother!" she kept saying in her heart; but she could not reassure herself. The forsaken fire, the open door haunted her. She would succeed for a moment

or two in quieting her fears, calling them foolish; the next they would rush upon her like a cataract, and almost overwhelm her. While she was busy with the dead, he might be slowly sinking into the same sleep from which she could not wake Phemy!

She laid the snow-cold captive straight, and left her to sleep on. Then, calling the dog, she left the hut, in the hope of meeting her mother, and learning that Steenie was at home.

Now and then, while at her sad task, she had been reminded of the wind by its hollow roaring all about the hill, but not until she opened the door had she any notion how the snow was falling; neither until she left the hollow for the bare hill-side did she realize how the wind was raging. Then indeed the world looked dangerous! If Steenie was out, if her mother had started, they were lost! She would have gone back into the hut with the dead, but that she might get home in time to prevent her mother from setting out, or might meet her on the way. At the same time the tempest between her and her home looked but a little less terrible to her than a sea breaking on a rocky shore.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW KIRSTY FARED

It was quite dark, and round her swept as it were a whirlpool of snow. The swift flakes struck at her eyes and ears like a swarm of vicious flies. In such a wind, the blows of the soft thin snow, beating upon her face, now from one quarter, now from another, were enough to bewilder even a strong woman like Kirsty. They were like hail to a horse. After trying for a while to force her way, she suddenly became aware of utter ignorance as to the direction in which she was going, and, for the first time in her life, a fell terror possessed her—not for herself, but for Steenie and her father and mother. To herself, Kirsty was nobody, but she belonged to David and Marion Barclay, and what were they and Steenie to do without her! They would go on looking for her till they too died, and were buried yards deep in the snow!

She kept struggling on, her head bent, and her body leaning forward, forcing herself against, it hardly seemed through, the snow-filled wind—but whither? It was only by the feel of the earth under her feet, that she could tell, and at times she was by no means sure, whether she was going up or down hill. She kept on and on, almost hopeless of getting anywhere, certain of nothing but that, if once she

sat down, she would never rise again. Fatigue that must not yield, and the inroads of the cold sleep, at length affected her brain, and her imagination began to take its own way with her. She thought herself condemned to one of those awful dust-towers, for she had read Prideaux, specially devilish invention of the Persians, in which, by the constant stirring of the dust so that it filled the air, the lungs of the culprit were at length absolutely choked up. Dead of the dust, she revived to the snow: it was fearfully white, for it was all dead faces; she crushed and waded through those that fell, while multitudes came whirling up on her from all sides. Gladly would she have thrown herself down among them, but she must walk, walk on forever!

All the time, she felt in her dim suffering as if not she but those at home suffered: she had deserted them in trouble, and do what she might—she would never get back to them! She could, she thought, if she but put forth the needful energy, but the last self-exhaustive effort never would come!

Where was the dog? He had left her! he was nowhere near her! She tried to call him, but the storm choked every sound in her very throat. He would never have left her to save himself! He who makes the dogs must be at least as faithful as they! So she was not left comfortless!

Then she heard, or thought she heard the church-bell, and that may have had something to do with the strange dream out of which she came gradually to herself.

CHAPTER XXV

KIRSTY'S DREAM

HER dream was this:—

She sat at the communion-table in her own parish-church, with many others, none of whom she knew. A man with piercing eyes went along the table, examining the faces of all to see if they were fit to partake. When he came to Kirsty, he looked at her for a moment sharply, then said, "That woman is dead. She has been in the snow all night. Lay her in the vault under the church." She rose to go because she was dead, and hands were laid upon her to guide her as she went. They brought her out of the church into the snow and wind, and turned away to leave her. But she remonstrated: "The man with the eyes," she said, "gave the order that I should be taken to the vault of the church!"—"Very well," answered a voice, "there is the vault! creep into it." She saw an opening in the ground, at the foot of the wall of the church, and getting down on her hands and knees, crept through it, and with difficulty got into the vault. There all was still. She heard the wind raving, but it sounded afar off. Who had guided her thither? One of Steenie's storm-angels, or the Shepherd of the sheep? It was all one, for the storm-angels were his sheep-dogs! She had been bewildered by the terrible beating of the snow-wind,

but her own wandering was another's guiding! Beyond the turmoil of life and unutterably glad, she fell asleep, and the dream left her. In a little while, however, it came again.

She was lying, she thought, on the stone-floor of the church-vault, and wondered whether the examiner, notwithstanding the shining of his eyes, might not have made a mistake: perhaps she was not so very dead! perhaps she was not quite unfit to eat of the bread of life after all! She moved herself a little; then tried to rise, but failed; tried again and again, and at last succeeded. All was dark around her, but something seemed present that was known to her—whether man, or woman, or beast, or thing, she could not tell. At last she recognized it; a familiar odor it was, a peculiar smell, of the kind we call earthy:—it was the air of her own earth-house, in days that seemed far away! Perhaps she was in it now! Then her box of matches might be there too! She felt about and found it. With trembling hands she struck one, and proceeded to light her lamp.

It burned up. Something seized her by the heart.

A little farther in, stretched on the floor, lay a human form on its face. She knew at once that it was Steenie's. The feet were toward her, and between her and them a pair of shoes: he was dead!—he had got rid of his feet!—he was gone after Phemy—gone to the bonny man! She knelt, and turned the body over. Her heart was like a stone. She raised his head on her arm: it was plain he was dead. A small stream of blood had flowed from his mouth, and made a little pool, not yet quite frozen. Kirsty's

heart seemed about to break from her bosom to go after him; then the eternal seemed to descend upon her like a waking sleep, a clear consciousness of peace. It was for a moment as if she saw the Father at the heart of the universe, with all his children about his knees: her pain and sorrow and weakness were gone; she wept glad tears over the brother called so soon from the nursery to the great presence chamber. "Eh, bonny man!" she cried; "is't possible to expec ower muckle frae your father and mine!"

She sat down beside what was left of Steenie, and ate of the oatcake, and drank of the milk she had carried forgotten until now.

"I won'er what God'll du wi' the twa!" she said to herself. "Gien *I* lo'ed them baith as I did, *he* lo'es them better! *I* wud hae dee'd for them; *he* did!"

She rose and went out.

Light had come at last, but too dim to be more than gray. The world was one large white sepulchre in which the earth lay dead. Warmth and hope and spring seemed gone forever. But God was alive; his hearth-fire burned; therefore death was nowhere. She knew it in her own soul, for the Father was there, and she knew that in his soul were all the loved. The wind had ceased, but the snow was still falling, here and there a flake. A faint blueness filled the air, and was colder than the white. Whether the day was at hand or the night, she could not distinguish. The church bell began to ring, sounding from far away through the silence: what mountains of snow must yet tower unfallen in the heavens, when it was nearly noon and still so dark! But Steenie was out of the snow—that was well! Or perhaps he was be-

side her in it, only he could leave it when he would! Surely anyhow Phemy must be with him! She could not be left all alone and she so silly! Steenie would have her to teach! His trouble must have gone the moment he died, but Phemy would have to find out what a goose she was! She would be very miserable, and would want Steenie! Kirsty's thoughts cut their own channels: she was as far ahead of her church as the woman of Samaria was ahead of the high priest at Jerusalem.

Thus thinking, thinking, she kept on walking through the snow to weep on her mother's bosom. Suddenly she remembered, and stood still: her mother was going to follow her to Steenie's house! She too must be dead in the snow!—Well, let Heaven take all! They were born to die, and it was her turn now to follow her mother! She started again for home, and at length drew near the house.

It was more like a tomb than a house. The door looked as if no one had gone in there or out for ages. Had she slept in the snow like the seven sleepers in the cave? Were the need and the use of houses and doors long over? Or was she a ghost come to have one look more at her old home in a long dead world? Perhaps her father and mother might have come back with like purpose, and she would see and speak to them! Or was she, alas! only in a dream, in which the dead would not speak to her? But God was not dead, and while God lived she was not alone even in a dream!

A dark bundle lay on the door-step: it was Snootie. He had been scratching and whining until despair came upon him, and he lay down to die.

She lifted the latch, stepped over the dog, and entered. The peat-fire was smouldering low on the hearth. She sat down and closed her eyes. When she opened them, there lay Snootie, stretched out before the fire! She rose and shut the door, fed and roused the fire, and brought the dog some milk, which he lapped up eagerly.

Not a sound was in the house. She went all over it. Father nor mother was there. It was Sunday, and all the men were away. A cow lowed, and in her heart Kirsty blessed her: she was a live creature! She would go and milk her!

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW DAVID FARED

DAVID BARCLAY got up the moment Kirsty was out of the room, dressed himself in haste, swallowed a glass of whiskey, saddled the gray mare, gave her a feed of oats, which she ate the faster that she felt the saddle, and set out for Tiltowie to get the doctor. Threatening as the weather was, he was well on the road before the wind became so full of snow as to cause him any anxiety either for those on the hill or for himself. But after the first moment of anxiety, a very few minutes convinced him that a battle with the elements was at hand more dangerous than he had ever had to fight with armed men. For some distance the road was safe enough as yet, for the storm had not had time to heap up the snow between the bordering hills; but by and by he must come out upon a large tract recovered by slow degrees and great labor from the bog, and be exposed to the full force of the now furious wind where, in many places it would be far easier to wander off than to stay upon a road level with the fields, and bounded not even by a ditch the size of a wheel-track. When he reached the open, therefore, he was compelled to go at a foot-pace through the thick, blinding, bewildering, tempest-driven snow; and was not surprised when, in spite of all his caution, he found,

by the sudden sinking and withdrawing of one of his mare's legs with a squelching noise, that he had got astray upon the bog, nor knew any more in what direction the town or other abode of humanity lay. The only thing he did know was the side of the road to which he had turned; and that he knew only by the ground into which he had got: no step farther must in that direction be attempted! His mare seemed to know this as well as himself, for when she had pulled her leg out, she drew back a pace, and stood; whereupon David cast a knot on the reins, threw them on her neck, and told her to go where she pleased. She turned half round and started at once, feeling her way at first very carefully. Then she walked slowly on, with her head hanging low. Again and again she stopped and snuffed, diverged a little, and went on.

The wind was packed rather than charged with snow. Men said there never was a wind of the strength with so much snow in it. David began to despair of ever finding the road again, and naturally in such strait thought how much worse would Kirsty and Steenie be faring on the open hill-side. His wife, he knew, could not have started before the storm rose to tempest, and would delay her departure. Then came the reflection, how little at any time could a father do for the well-being of his children! The fact of their being children implied their need of an all-powerful father: must there not then be such a father? Therewith the truth dawned upon him, that first of truths, which all his church-going and Bible-reading had hitherto failed to disclose, that, for life to be a good thing and worth living, a

man must be the child of a perfect father, and know him. In his terrible perturbation about his children, he lifted up his heart—not to the Governor of the world; not to the God of Abraham or Moses; not in the least to the God of the Kirk; least of all to the God of the Shorter Catechism; but to the faithful creator and Father of David Barclay. The aching soul which none but a perfect father could have created capable of deploring its own fatherly imperfection, cried out to the father of fathers on behalf of his children, and as he cried, a peace came stealing over him such as he had never before felt.

Then he knew that his mare had been for some time on hard ground, and was going with purpose in her gentle trot. In five minutes more, he saw the glimmer of a light through the snow. Near as it was, or he could not have seen it, he failed repeatedly in finding his way to it. The mare at length fell over a stone wall out of sight in the snow, and when they got up they found themselves in a little garden at the end of a farm-house. Not, however, until the farmer came to the door, wondering who on such a morning could be their visitor, did he know to what farm the mare had brought him. Weary, and well aware that no doctor in his senses would set out for the top of the Horn in such a tempest of black and white, he gratefully accepted the shelter and refreshment of which his mare and he stood by this time in much need, and waited for a lull in the storm.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW MARION FARED

IN the mean time the mother of the family, not herself at the moment in danger, began to suffer the most. It dismayed her to find, when she came down, that Steenie had, as she thought, insisted on accompanying Kirsty, but it was without any great anxiety that she set about preparing food with which to follow them.

She was bending over her fire, busy with her cooking, when all at once the wind came rushing straight down the chimney, blew sleet into the kitchen, blew soot into the pot, and nearly put out the fire. It was but a small whirlwind, however, and presently passed.

She went to the door, opened it a little way, and peeped out: the morning was a chaos of blackness and snow and wind. She had been born and brought up in a yet wilder region, but the storm threatened to be such as in her experience was unparalleled.

"God preserve 's!" cried the poor woman, "can this be the en' o' a'thing? Is the earth turnin intil a muckle snaw-wreath, 'at whan a' are deid, there may be nae miss o' fowk to beery them? Eh, sic a sepulchrin! Mortal wuman cudna carry a basket in sic a leevin snaw-drift! Losh, she wudna carry hersel far! I maun bide a bit gien I wad be ony succor til

them! It's my basket they'll be wantin', no me, and i' this drift, basket may flee but it winna float!"

She turned to her cooking as if it were the one thing to save the world. Let her be prepared for the best as well as for the worst! Kirsty might find Phemy past helping, and bring Steenie home! Then there was David, at that moment fighting for his life, perhaps!—if he came home now, or any of the three, she must be ready to save their lives! they must not perish on her hands! So she prepared for the possible future, not by brooding on it, but by doing the work of the present. She cooked and cooked, until there was nothing more to be done in that way, and then having thus cleared the way for it, sat down and cried. There was a time for tears: the Bible said there was! and when Marion's hands fell into her lap, their hour—and not till then, was come. To go out after Kirsty would have been the bare foolishness of suicide, would have been to abandon her husband and children against the hour of their coming need: one of the hardest demands on the obedience of faith is to do nothing; it is often so much easier to do foolishly!

But she did not weep long. A moment more and she was up and at work again, hanging the great kettle of water on the crook, and blowing up the fire, that she might have hot bottles to lay in every bed. Then she assailed the peat-stack in spite of the wind, making to it journey after journey, until she had heaped a great pile of peats in the corner nearest the hearth.

The morning wore on; the storm continued raging; no news came from the white world; mankind had

vanished in the whirling snow. It was well the men had gone home, she thought: there would only have been the more in danger, the more to be fearful about, for all would have been abroad in the drift, hopelessly looking for one another! But oh Steenie, Steenie! and her ain Kirsty!

About half-past ten o'clock, the wind began to abate its violence, and speedily sank to a calm, wherewith the snow lost its main terror. She looked out: it was falling in straight, silent lines, flickering slowly down, but very thick. She could find her way now! Hideous fears assailed her, but she banished them imperiously: they should not sap the energy whose every jot would be wanted! She caught up the bottle of hot milk she had kept ready, wrapped it in flannel, tied it, with a loaf of bread, in a shawl about her waist, made up the fire, closed the door, and set out for Steenie's house on the Horn.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Two hours or so earlier, David, perceiving some assuagement in the storm, and his host having offered to go at once to the doctor and the schoolmaster, had taken his mare, and mounted to go home. He met with no impediment now except the depth of the snow, which made it so hard for the mare to get along that, full of anxiety about his children, he found the distance a weary one to traverse.

When at length he reached the Knowe no one was there to welcome him. He saw, however, by the fire and the food, that Marion was not long gone. He put up the gray, clothed her and fed her, drank some milk, caught up a *quarter* of cakes, and started for the hill.

The snow was not falling so thickly now, but it had already almost obliterated the footprints of his wife. Still he could distinguish them in places, and with some difficulty succeeded in following their track until it was clear which route she had taken. They indicated the easier, though longer way—not that by the earth-house, and the father and daughter passed without seeing each other. When Kirsty got to the farm, her father was following her mother up the hill.

When David reached the Hillfauld, the name he always gave Steenie's house, he found the door open,

and walked in. His wife did not hear him, for his iron-shod shoes were balled with snow. She was standing over the body of Phemy, looking down on the white sleep with a solemn, motherly, tearless face. She turned as he drew near, and the pair, like the lovers they were, fell each in the other's arms. Marion was the first to speak.

"Eh Dauvid! God be praised I hae yersel!"

"Is the puir thing gane?" asked her husband in an awe-hushed tone, looking down on the maid that was not dead but sleeping.

"I doobt there's no doobt aboot that," answered Marion. "Steenie, I was jist thinkin, wud be sair disapp'intit to learn 'at there was. Eh, the faith o' that laddie! H'aven to him's sic a rale place, and sic a hantle better nor this warl, 'at he wad not only fain be there himsel, but wad hae Phemy there—ay, gien it war ever sae lang afore himsel! Ye see he kens naething aboot sin and the saicrifeece, and he disna un'erstan 'at Phemy was aye a gey wull kin' o' a lassie!"

"Maybe the bonny man, as Steenie ca's him," returned David, "may hae as muckle compassion for the puir thing i' the hert o' 'im as Steenie himsel!"

"Ow ay! Whatfor no! But what can the bonny man himsel du, a' bein sattlet?"

"Dinna leemit the Almichty, wuman—and that i' the verra moment whan he's been to hiz—I wunna say mair gracious nor ord'nar, for that cudna be—but whan he's latten us see a bit plainer nor common that he *is* gracious! The Lord o' mercy 'ill manage to luik efter the lammie he made, ae w'y or ither, there as here. Ye daurna say he didna du his best

for her here, and wull he no du his best for her there as weel?"

"Doobtless, Dauvid! But ye fricht me! It souns jist rank papistry—naither mair nor less! What *can* he du? He canna dee again for ane 'at wudna turn til 'im i' this life! The thing's no to be thoucht!"

"Hoo ken ye that, wuman? Ye hae jist thoucht it yersel! Gien I was you, I wudna daur to say what he cudna du! I' the mean time, what he maks me able to houp, I'm no gaein to fling frae me!"

David was a true man: he could not believe a thing with one half of his mind, and care nothing about it with the other. He, like his Steenie, believed in the bonny man about in the world, not in the mere image of him standing in the precious shrine of the New Testament.

After a brief silence—

"Whaur's Kirsty and Steenie?" he said.

"The Lord kens; I dinna."

"They'll be safe eneuch."

"It's no likly."

"It's sartin," said David.

And therewith, by the side of the dead, he imparted to his wife the thoughts that drove misery from his heart as he sat on his mare in the storm with the reins on her neck, nor knew whither she went.

"Ay, ay," returned his wife after a pause, "ye're unco richt, Dauvid, as aye ye are! And I'm jist conscience-stricken to think 'at a' my life lang I hae been ready to murn ower the sorrow i' *my* hert, never thinkin o' the glaidness i' God's! What call had I to greit ower Steenie, whan God maun hae been aye sair pleased wi' him! What sense is there in lamen-

tation sae lang's God's eident settin richt a'! His hert's the safity o' oors. And eh, glaid sure he maun be, wi sic a lot o' his bairns at hame aboot him!"

"Ay," returned David with a sigh, thinking of his old comrade and the son he had left behind him, "but there's the prodigal anes!"

"Thank God, we hae nae prodigal!"

"Aye, thank him!" rejoined David; "but *he* has prodigals that trouble him sair, and we maun see til't 'at we binna thankless auld prodigals oorsels!"

Again followed a brief silence.

"Eh, but isna it strange?" said Marion. "Here's you and me stanin murnin ower anither man's bairn, and naewise kennin what's come o' oor ain twa!—Dauvid, what *can* hae come o' Steenie and Kirsty?"

"The wull o' God's what's come o' them; and God haud me i' the grace o' wussin naething ither nor that same!"

"Haud to that, Dauvid, and haud me till't: we kenna what's comin!"

"The wull o' God's comin," insisted David. "But eh," he added, "I'm concernt for puir Maister Craig!"

"Weel, lat's awa hame and see whether the twa bena there afore's!—Eh, but the sicht o' the bonny corp maun hae gien Steenie a sair hert! I wudna won'er gien he never wan ower't i' this life!"

"But what'll we du aboot it or we gang? It's the storm may come on again waur nor ever, and mak it impossible to beery her for a month!"

"We cudna carry her hame atween 's, Dauvid—think ye?"

"Na, na; it's no as gien it was hersel! And cauld's a fine keeper—better nor a' the embalmin o'

the Egyptians! Only I'm fain to haud Steenie ohn seen her again!"

"Weel, lat's hap her i' the bonny white snaw!" said Marion. "She'll keep there as lang as the snow keeps, and naething 'ill disturb her till the time comes to lay her awa!"

"That's weel thoucht o'!" answered David. "Eh, wuman, but it's a bonny beerial compared wi sic as I hae aften gien comrade and foe alike!"

They went out and chose a spot close by the house where the snow lay deep. There they made a hollow, and pressed the bottom of it down hard. Then they carried out and laid in it the death-frozen dove, and heaped upon her a firm, white, marble-like tomb of heavenly new-fallen snow.

Without re-entering it, they closed the door of Steenie's refuge, and leaving the two deserted houses side by side, made what slow haste they could, with anxious hearts, to their home. The snow was falling softly, for the wind was still asleep.

CHAPTER XXIX

DAVID, MARION, KIRSTY, SNOOTIE, AND WHAT WAS LEFT OF STEENIE

KIRSTY saw their shadows darken the wall, and turning from her work at the dresser, ran to the door to meet them.

"God be thankit!" cried David.

Marion gave her daughter one loving look, and entering cast a fearful, questioning glance around the kitchen.

"Whaur's Steenie?" she said.

"He's wi' Phemy, I'm thinkin," faltered Kirsty.

"Lassie, are ye dementit?" her mother almost screamed. "We're this minute come frae there!"

"He *is* wi' Phemy, mother. The Lord canna surely hae pairtit them, gangin in maist haudin han's!"

"Kirsty, I haud ye accoontable for my Steenie!" cried Marion, sinking on a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

"It's the wull o' God 'at's accoontable for him, wuman!" answered David, sitting down beside her, and laying hold of her arm.

She burst into terrible weeping.

"He maun be sair at hame wi' the bonny man!" said Kirsty.

"Lassie," said David, "you and me and yer mither, we hae naething left but be better bairns, and gang the fester to the bonny man!—Whaur's what's left o' the laddie, Kirsty?"

"Lyin i' my hoose, as he ca'd it. Mine was i' the yerd, his i' the air, he said. He was awa afore I wan to the kitchen. He had jist killt himsel savin at Phemy, rinnin and fechtin on, upo' the barest chance o' savin her life; and sae whan he set aff to gang til her, no bidin for me, he was that forfouchten 'at he hed a bluid-brak in 's breist, and was jist able, and nae mair, to creep intil the weem oot o' the snaw. He didna like the place, and yet had a kin' o' a notion o' the bonny man bein there whiles. I'm thinkin Snootie maun hae won til him, and run hame for help, for I faund him maist deid upo' the door-step."

David stooped and patted the dog.

"Na, that cudna be," he said, "or he wud never hae left him, I'm thinkin.—Ye're a braw dog," he went on to the collie, "and I'm thankfu' ye're no lyin wi yer tongue oot!—But guid comes to guid doggies!" he added, fondling the creature, who had risen, and feebly set his paws on his knees.

"And ye left him lyin there! Hoo hed ye the hert, Kirsty?" sobbed the mother reproachfully.

"Mother, he was better aff nor ony ither ane o' 's! I winna say, mother, 'at I lo'ed him sae weel as ye lo'ed him, for maybe that wudna be natur—I dinna ken; and I daurna say 'at I lo'e him as the bonny man lo'es his brithers and sisters a'; but I hae yet to learn hoo to lo'e him better. Onygait, the bonny man wantit him, and he has him! And whan I left

him there, it was jist as gien I hield him oot i' my airms and said, 'Hae, Lord; tak him: he's yer ain!'"

"Ye're i' the richt, Kirsty, my bonny bairn!" said David. "Yer mither and me, we was never but pleased wi' onything 'at ever ye did.—Isna that true, Mar'on, my ain wuman?"

"True as his word!" answered the mother, and rose, and went to her room.

David sought the yard, saw that all was right with the beasts, and fed them. Thence he made his way to his workshop over the cart-shed, where in five minutes he constructed, with two poles run through two sacks, a very good stretcher. Carrying it to the kitchen, where Kirsty sat motionless, looking into the fire,—

"Kirsty," he said, "ye're 'maist as strong's a man, and I wudna wullinly ony but oor ain three sels laid finger upo' what's left o' Steenie: are ye up to takin the feet o' 'im to fess him hame? Here's what'll mak it 'maist easy!"

Kirsty rose at once.

"A drappy o' milk, and I'm ready," she answered. "Wull ye no tak a moofu' o' whuskey yersel, father?"

"Na, na; I want naething," replied David.

He had not yet learned what Kirsty went through the night before, when he asked her to help him carry the body of her brother home through the snow. Kirsty, however, knew no reason why she should not be as able as her father.

He took the stretcher, and they set out, saying nothing to the mother: she was still in her own room, and they hoped she might fall asleep.

"It min's me o' the women gauin til the sepulchre!" said David. "Eh, but it maun hae been a sair time til them!—a heap sairer nor this hert-brak here!"

"Ye see they didna ken 'at he wasna deid," assented Kirsty, "and we div ken 'at Steenie's no deid! He's maybe walkin aboot wi the bonny man —or maybe jist ristin himsel a wee efter the uprisin! Jist think o' his heid bein a' richt, and his een as clear as the bonny man's ain! Eh, but Steenie maun be in grit glee!"

Thus talking as they went, they reached and entered the earth-house. They found no angels on guard, for Steenie had not to get up again.

David wept the few tears of an old man over the son who had been of no use in the world but the best use—to love and be loved. Then, one at the head and the other at the feet, they brought the body out, and laid it on the bier.

Kirsty went in again, and took Steenie's shoes, tying them in her apron.

"His feet's no sic a weicht noo!" she said, as together they carried their burden home.

The mother met them at the door.

"Eh!" she cried, "I thoucht the Lord had taen ye baith, and left me my lane 'cause I was sae hard-hertit til him! But noo 'at he's broucht ye back—and Steenie, what there is o' him, puir bairn!—I s' never say anither word, but jist lat him du as he likes. —There, Lord, I hae dune! Pardon thoo me wha canst."

They carried the forsaken thing up the stair, and laid it on Kirsty's bed, looking so like and so unlike Steenie asleep. Marion was so exhausted, both

mind and body, that her husband insisted on her postponing all further ministration till the morning; but at night Kirsty unclothed the untenanted, and put on it a long white nightgown. When the mother saw it lying thus, she smiled, and wept no more; she knew that the bonny man had taken home his idiot.

CHAPTER XXX

FROM SNOW TO FIRE

My narrative must now go a little way back in time, and a long way from the region of heather and snow, to India in the year of the mutiny. The regiment in which Francis Gordon served, his father's old regiment, had lain for months besieged in a well-known city by the native troops, and had begun to know what privation meant, its suffering aggravated by that of not a few women and children. With the other portions of the Company's army there shut up, it had behaved admirably. Danger and sickness, wounds and fatigue, hunger and death, had brought out the best that was in the worst of them: when their country knew how they had fought and endured, she was proud of them. Had their enemies, however, been naked Zulus, they would have taken the place within a week.

Francis Gordon had done his part, and well.

It would be difficult to analyze the effect of the punishment Kirsty had given him, but its influence was upon him through the whole of the terrible time —none the less beneficent that his response to her stinging blows was indignant rage. I dare hardly speculate what, had she not defended herself so that he could not reach her, he might not have done in the first instinctive motions of natural fury. It is

possible that only Kirsty's skill and courage saved him from what he would never have surmounted the shame of—taking revenge on a woman avenging a woman's wrong: from having deserved to be struck by a woman, nothing but repentant shame could save him.

When he came to himself, the first bitterness of the thing over, he could not avoid the conviction, that the playmate of his childhood, whom once he loved best in the world, and who when a girl refused to marry him, had come to despise him, and that righteously. The idea took a firm hold on him, and became his most frequently recurrent thought. The wale of Kirsty's whip served to recall it a good many nights; and long after that had ceased to either smart or show, the thought would return of itself in the night-watches, and was certain to come when he had done anything his conscience called wrong, or his judgment foolish.

The officers of his mess were mostly men of character with ideas better at least than ordinary as to what became a man; and their influence on one by no means of a low, though of an unstable nature, was elevating. It is true that a change into a regiment of jolly, good-mannered, unprincipled men, would within a month have brought him to do as they did; and in another month would have quite silenced, for a time at least, his poor little conscience; but he was at present rising. Events had been in his favor; after reaching India, he had no time to be idle; the mutiny broke out, he must bestir himself, and, as I have said, the best in him was called to the front.

He was specially capable of action with show in it. Let the eyes be bent upon him, and he would go far. The presence of his kind to see and laud was an inspiration to him. Left to act for himself, undirected and unseen, his courage would not have proved of the highest order. Throughout the siege, nevertheless, he was noted for a daring that often left the bounds of prudence far behind. More than once he was wounded—once seriously; but even then he was in four days again at his post. His genial manners, friendly carriage, and gay endurance, rendered him a favorite with all.

The sufferings of the besieged at length grew such, and there was so little likelihood of the approaching army being able for some time to relieve the place, that orders were issued by the commander-in-chief to abandon it: every British person must be out of the city before the night of the day following. The general in charge thereupon resolved to take advantage of the very bad watch kept by the enemy, and steal away in silence the same night.

The order was given to the companies, to each man individually, to prepare for the perilous attempt, but to keep it absolutely secret save from those who were to accompany them; and so cautious was the little English colony as well as the garrison, that not a rumor of the intending evacuation reached the besiegers, while, throughout the lines and in the cantonments, it was thoroughly understood that, at a certain hour of the night, without call of bugle or beat of drum, every one should be ready to march. Ten minutes after that hour the garrison was in motion. With difficulty, yet with sufficing silence,

the gates were passed, and the abandonment effected.

The first shot of the enemy's morning salutation, earlier than usual, went tearing through a bungalow within whose shattered walls lay Francis Gordon. In a dining-room, whose balcony and window-frame had been smashed the day before, he still slumbered wearily, when close past his head rushed the eighteen-pounder with its infernal scream. He started up, to find the blood flowing from a splinter wound on his temple and cheek-bone. A second shot struck the foot of his long chair. He sprang from it, and hurried into his coat and waistcoat.

But how was all so still inside? Not one gun answered! Firing at such an hour, he thought, the rebels must have got wind of their intended evacuation. It was too late for that, but why did not the garrison reply? Between the shots he seemed to *hear* the universal silence. Heavens! were their guns already spiked? If so, all was lost!—But it was daylight! He had overslept himself! He ought to have been with his men—how long ago he could not tell, for the first shot had taken his watch. A third came and broke his sword, carrying the hilt of it through the wall on which it hung. Not a sound, not a murmur reached him from the fortifications. Could the garrison be gone? Was the hour past? Had no one missed him? Certainly no one had called him! He rushed into the compound. Not a creature was there! He was alone—one English officer amid a revolted army of hating Indians!

But they did not yet know that their prey had slid from their grasp, for they were going on with their

usual gun-reveillé, instead of rushing on flank and rear of the retreating column! He might yet elude them and overtake the garrison! Half-dazed, he hurried for the gate by which they were to leave the city. Not a live thing save two starved dogs did he meet on his way. One of them ran from him; the other would have followed him, but a ball struck the ground beween them, raising a cloud of dust, and he saw no more of the dog.

He found the gate open, and not one of the enemy in sight. Tokens of the retreat were plentiful, making the track he had to follow plain enough.

But now an enemy he had never encountered before—a sense of loneliness and desertion and helplessness, rising to utter desolation, all at once assailed him. He had never in his life congratulated himself on being alone—not that he loved his neighbor, but that he loved his neighbor's company, making him less aware of an uneasy self. And now first he realized that he had seen his sword-hilt go off with a round shot, and had not caught up his revolver—that he was, in fact, absolutely unarmed.

He quickened his pace to overtake his comrades. On and on he trudged through nothing but rice-fields, the day growing hotter and hotter, and his sense of desolation increasing. Two or three natives passed him, who looked at him, he thought, with sinister eyes. He had eaten no breakfast, and was not likely to have any lunch. He grew sick and faint, but there was no refuge: he must walk, walk until he fell and could walk no more! With the heat and his exertion, his hardly healed wound began to assert itself; and by and by he felt so ill, that he

turned off the road, and lay down. While he lay, the eyes of his mind began to open to the fact that the courage he had hitherto been so eager to show, could hardly have been of the right sort, seeing it was gone—evaporated clean.

He rose and resumed his walk, but at every smallest sound started in fear of a lurking foe. With vainest regret he remembered the long-bladed dagger-knife he had when a boy carried always in his pocket. It was exhaustion and illness, true, that destroyed his courage, but not the less was he a man of fear, not the less he felt himself a coward. Again he got into a damp brake and lay down, in a minute or two again got up and went on, his fear growing until, mainly through consciousness of itself, it ripened into abject terror. Loneliness seemed to have taken the shape of a watching omnipresent enemy, out of whose diffusion death might at any moment break in some hideous form.

It was getting toward night when at length he saw dust ahead of him, and soon after, he descried the straggling rear of the retreating English. Before he reached it a portion had halted for a little rest, and he was glad to lie down in a rough cart. Long before the morning the cart was on its way again, Gordon in it, raving with fever, and unable to tell who he was. He was soon in friendly shelter, however, under skilful treatment, and tenderly nursed.

When at length he seemed to have almost recovered his health, it was clear that he had in great measure lost his reason.

CHAPTER XXXI

KIRSTY SHOWS RESENTMENT

THINGS were going from bad to worse at Castle Weelset. Whether Mrs. Gordon had disgusted her friends or got tired of them, I do not know, but she remained at home, seldom had a visitor, and never a guest. Rumor, busy in country as in town, said she was more and more manifesting herself a slave to strong drink. She was so tired of herself, that, to escape her double, she made it increasingly a bore to her. She never read a book, never had a newspaper sent her, never inquired how things were going on about the place or in any part of the world, did nothing for herself or others, only ate, drank, slept, and raged at those around her.

One morning David Barclay, having occasion to see the factor, went to the castle, and finding he was at home ill, thought he would make an attempt to see Mrs. Gordon, and offer what service he could render: she might not have forgotten that in old days he had been a good deal about the estate. She received him at once, but behaved in such extraordinary fashion that he could not have any doubt she was at least half-drunk: there was no sense, David said, either to be got out of her, or put into her.

At Corbyknowe they heard nothing of the young laird. The papers said a good deal about the state

of things in India, but Francis Gordon was not mentioned.

In the autumn of the year 1858, when the days were growing short, and the nights cold in the high region about the Horn, the son of a neighboring farmer, who had long desired to know Kirsty better, called at Corbyknowe with his sister, ostensibly on business with David. They were shown into the parlor, and all were sitting together in the early gloamin, the young woman bent on persuading Kirsty to pay them a visit and see the improvements they had made in house and garden, and the two farmers lamenting the affairs of the property on which they were tenants.

"But I hear there's new grief like to come to the auld lairdship;" said William Lammie, as he sat with an elbow on the tea-table whence Kirsty was removing the crumbs.

"And what may the wisdom o' the country-side be puttin furth the noo?" asked David, in a tone of good-humored irony.

"Weel, as I hear, Mistress Comrie's been to Embro' for a week or twa, and's come hame wi' a gey queer story concernin the young laird—awa oot there whaur there's been sic a rumpus wi' the h'athen so'diers. There's word come, she says, 'at he's fa'en intil the verra glaur o' disgrace, funkin at something they set him til: na, he wudna! And they hed him afore a coort-mairtial as they ca' 't, and broucht it in, she says, bare cooardice, and jist broke him. He'll hae ill shawin the face o' 'm again i' 's ain calf-country!"

"It's a lee," said Kirsty. "I s' tak my aith o' that, whaever took the tellin o' 't. There never was

mark o' cooard upo Francie Gordon. He hed his fauts, but no ane o' them luikit that gait. He was a kin' o' saft-like whiles, and unco easy come ower, but, haein little fear mysel, I ken a cooard whan I see him. Something may hae set up his pride—he has eneuch o' that for twa deevils—but Francie was never nae cooard!"

"Dinna lay the lee at my door, I beg o' ye, Miss Barclay. I was but tellin ye what fowk was saying."

"Fowk's aye sayin, and seldom sayin true. The warst o' 't is 'at honest fowk's aye ready to believe leears! They dinna lee themsel's and sae it's no easy to them to think anither wad. Thereby the fause word has free coorse and is glorifeed! They're no a' leears 'at spreads the lee; but for them 'at maks the lee, the Lord silence them!"

"Hoots, Kirsty," said her mother, "it disna become ye to curse naebody! It's no richt o' ye."

"It's a guid Bible-curse, mother! It's but a w'y o' sayin 'His wull be dune!'"

"Ye needna be sae fell aboot the laird, Miss Barclay! He was nae partic'lar frien o' yours gien a' tales be true!" remarked her admirer.

"I'm tellin ye tales is maistly lees. I hae kenned the laird sin' he was a wee laddie—and afore that; and I'm no gaein to hear him leed upo' and haud my tongue! A lee's a lee whether the leear be a leear or no!—I hae dune."

She did not speak another word to him save to bid him good-night.

In the beginning of the year, a rumor went about the country that the laird had been seen at the castle, but it died away.

David pondered, but asked no questions, and Mrs. Bremner volunteered no information.

Kirsty of course heard the rumor, but she never took much interest in the goings on at the castle. Mrs. Gordon's doings were not such as the angels desire to look into; and Kirsty, not distantly related to them, and inheriting a good many of their peculiarities, minded her own business.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE WORKSHOP

ONE night in the month of January, when the snow was falling thick, but the air, because of the cloud-blankets overhead, was not piercing, Kirsty went out to the workshop to tell her father that supper was ready. David was a Jack-of-all-trades—therein resembling a sailor rather than a soldier, and by the light of a single dip was busy with some bit of carpenter's work.

He did not raise his head when she entered, and heard her as if he did not hear. She wondered a little and waited. After a few moments of silence, he said quietly, without looking up—

"Are ye awaur o' onything by ord'nar, Kirsty?"

"Na, naething, father," answered Kirsty, wondering still.

"It's been beirin 'tsel in upo' me at my bench here, 'at Steenie's aboot the place the nicht. I canna help imaiginin he's been upo this verra flure ower and ower again sin' I cam oot, as gien he wad fain say something, but cudna, and gaed awa again."

"Think ye he's here at this moment, father?"

"Na, he's no."

"He used to think whiles the bonny man was aboot!" said Kirsty reflectively.

"My mother was a hielan wuman, and hed the

second sicht; there was no mainner o' doobt aboot it!" remarked David, also thoughtfully.

"And what wad ye draw frae that, father?" asked Kirsty.

"Ow, naething verra important, maybe, but just 'at possibly it micht be i' the faimily!"

"I wud like to ken yer verra thoucht, father!"

"Weel, it's jist this: I'm thinkin 'at some may be nearer the deid nor ithers."

"And, maybe," supplemented Kirsty, "some o' the deid may win nearer the livin nor ithers!"

"Ay, that's it! that's the haill o' 't!" answered David.

Kirsty turned her face toward the farthest corner. The place was rather large, and everywhere dark except within the narrow circle of the candle-light. In a quiet voice, with a little quaver in it, she said aloud:

"Gien ye be here, Steenie, and hae the pooer, lat's ken gien there be onything lyin til oor han' 'at ye wuss dune. I'm sure, gien there be, it's for oor sakes and no for yer ain, glaid as we wud a' be to du onything for ye: the bonny man lats ye want for naething; we're sure o' that!"

"Ay are we, Steenie," assented his father.

No voice came from the darkness. They stood silent for a while. Then David said—

"Gang in, lassie; yer mother 'ill be won'erin what's come o' ye. I'll be in in a meenit. I hae jist the last stroke to gie this bit jobby."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A RACE WITH DEATH

WITHOUT a word, but with disappointment in her heart that Steenie had not answered them, Kirsty obeyed. But she went round through the rick-yard that she might have a moment's thought with herself. Not a hand was laid upon her out of the darkness, no faintest sound came to her ears through the silently falling snow. But as she took her way between two ricks, where was just room for her to pass, she felt—felt, however, without the slightest sense of *material* opposition, that she could not go through. Endeavoring afterward to describe what rather she was aware of than felt, she said the nearest she could come to it, but it was not right, was to say that she seemed to encounter the ghost of solidity. Certainly nothing seemed to touch her. She made no attempt to overcome the resistance, and the moment she turned, knew herself free to move in any other direction. But as the house was still her goal, she tried another space between two of the ricks. There again she found she could not pass. Making a third essay in yet another interval, she was once more stopped in like fashion. With that came the conviction that she was wanted elsewhere, and with it the thought of the Horn. She turned her face from the house and made straight for the hill, only that she took,

as she had generally done with Steenie, the easier and rather longer way.

The notion of the presence of Steenie, which had been with her all the time, naturally suggested his house as the spot where she was wanted, and thither she sped. But the moment she reached, almost before she entered it, she felt as if it were utterly empty—as if it had not in it even air enough to give her breath.

When a place seems to repel us, when we feel as if we could not live there, what if the cause be that there are no souls in it making it comfortable to the spiritual sense? That the *knowledge* of such presence would make most people uneasy is no argument against the fancy: truth itself, its intrinsic, essential, necessary trueness unrecognized, must be repellent.

Kirsty did not remain a moment in Steenie's house, but set her face to go home by the shorter and rougher path leading over the earth-house and across the little burn.

The night continued dark, with an occasional thinning of the obscurity when some high current blew the clouds aside from a little nest of stars. Just as Kirsty reached the descent to the burn, the snow ceased, the clouds parted, and a faint worn moon appeared. She looked just like a little old lady too thin and too tired to go on living more than a night longer. But her waning life was yet potent over Kirsty, and her strange, wasted beauty, dying to rise again, made her glad as she went down the hill through the snow-crowned heather. The oppression which came on her in Steenie's house was gone entirely, and in the

face of the pale ancient moon her heart grew so light that she broke into a silly song which, while they were yet children, she made for Steenie, who was never tired of listening to it:—

Willy, wally, woo!
Hame comes the coo—
Hummle, bummle, moo!—
Widin ower the Bogie,
Hame to fill the cogie!
Bonny hummle coo,
Wi' her baggy fu'
O' butter and o' milk,
And cream as saft as silk,
A' gethered frae the gerse
Intil her tassly purse,
To be oors, no hers,
Gudewillie, hummle coo!
Willy, wally, woo!
Moo, Hummlie, moo!

Singing this childish rhyme, dear to the slow-waking soul of Steenie, she had come almost to the bottom of the hill, was just stepping over the top of the weem, when something like a groan startled her. She stopped and sent a keen-searching glance around. It came again, muffled and dull. It must be from the earth-house! Somebody was there! It could not be Steenie, for why should Steenie groan? But he might be calling her, and the weem changing the character of the sound! Anyhow she must be wanted! She dived in.

She could scarcely light the candle for the trembling of her hand and the beating of her heart. Slowly the flame grew, and the glimmer began to spread. She stood speechless, and stared. Out of the dark-

ness at her feet grew the form, as it seemed, of Steenie, lying on his face, just as when she found him there a year before. She dropped on her knees beside him.

He was alive at least, for he moved! "Of course," thought Kirsty, "he's alive: he never was anything else!" His face was turned from her, and his arm was under it. The arm next her lay out on the stones, and she took the ice-cold hand in hers: it was not Steenie's! She took the candle, and leaned across to see the face. God in heaven! there was the mark of her whip: it was Francie Gordon! She tried to rouse him. She could not; he was cold as ice, and seemed all but dead. But for the groan she had heard she would have been sure he was dead. She blew out the light, and, swift as her hands could move, took garment after garment off, and laid it, warm from her live heart, over and under him—all save one which she thought too thin to do him any good. Last of all, she drew her stockings over his hands and arms, and, leaving her shoes where Steenie's had lain, darted out of the cave. At the mouth of it she rose erect like one escaped from the tomb, and sped in dim-gleaming whiteness over the snow, scarce to have been seen against it. The moon was but a shred—a withered autumn leaf low fallen toward the dim plain of the west. As she ran she would have seemed to one of Steenie's angels, out that night on the hill, a newly disembodied ghost fleeing home. Swift and shadowless as the thought of her own brave heart, she ran. Her sense of power and speed was glorious. She felt—not thought—herself a human goddess, the daughter of the Eternal.

Up height and down hollow she flew, running her race with death, not an open eye, save the eyes of her father and mother, within miles of her in a world of sleep and snow and night. Nor did she slacken her pace as she drew near the house, she only ran more softly. At last she threw the door to the wall, and shot up the steep stair to her room, calling her mother as she went.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BACK FROM THE GRAVE

WHEN David came in to supper, he said nothing, expecting Kirsty every moment to appear. Marion was the first to ask what had become of her. David answered she had left him in the workshop.

"Bless the bairn! what can she be aboot this time o' nicht?" said her mother.

"I kenna," returned David.

When they had sat eating their supper for ten minutes, vainly expecting her, David went out to look for her. Returning unsuccessful, he found that Marion had sought her all over the house with like result. Then they became uneasy.

Before going to look for her, however, David had begun to suspect her absence in one way or another connected with the subject of their conversation in the workshop, to which he had not for the moment meant to allude. When now he told his wife what had passed, he was a little surprised to find that immediately she grew calm.

"Ow, than, she'll be wi' Steenie!" she said.

Nor did her patience fail, but revived that of her husband. They could not, however, go to bed, but sat by the fire, saying a word or two now and then. The slow minutes passed, and neither of them moved save David once to put on peats.

The house-door flew open suddenly, and they heard Kirsty cry, "Mother, mother!" but when they hastened to the door, no one was there. They heard the door of her room close, however, and Marion went up the stair. By the time she reached it, Kirsty was in a thick petticoat and buttoned-up cloth-jacket, had a pair of shoes on her bare feet, and was glowing a "celestial rosy-red." David stood where he was, and in half a minute Kirsty came in three leaps down the stair to him, to say that Francie was lying in the weem. In less than a minute the old soldier was out with the stable-lantern harnessing one of the horses, the oldest in the stable, good at standing, and not a bad walker. He called for no help, yet was round at the door so speedily as to astonish even Kirsty, who stood with her mother in the entrance by a pile of bedding. They put a mattress in the bottom of the cart, and plenty of blankets. Kirsty got in, lay down and covered herself up, to make the rough ambulance warm, and David drove off. They soon reached the *weem* and entered it.

The moment Kirsty had lighted the candle,

"Lassie," cried David, "there's been a wuman here!"

"It luiks like it," answered Kirsty: "I was here mysel, father!"

"Ay, ay! of coorse but here's claes—wuman's claes! Whaur cam they frae? Wha's claes can they be?"

"Wha's but mine?" returned Kirsty, as she stooped to remove from his face the garment that covered his head.

"The Lord preserve 's!—to the verra stockins upo' the han's o' 'm!"

"I had no dreid, father, o' the Lord seein me as he made me!"

"Lassie," cried David, with heartfelt admiration, "ye sud hae been dother til a field-mershall."

"I wudna be dother til a king!" returned Kirsty. "Gien I hed to be born again, I wudna be born 'cep it was to Dauvid Barclay."

"My ain lassie!" murmured her father. "But, eh," he added, interrupting his own thoughts, "we maun haud oor tongues till we've dune the thing we're sent to du!"

They bent at once to their task.

David was a strong man still, and Kirsty was as good at a lift as most men. They had no difficulty in raising Gordon between them, David taking his head and Kirsty his feet, but it was not without difficulty they got him through the passage. In the cart they covered him so that, had he been a new-born baby, he could have taken no harm except it were by suffocation, and then, Kirsty sitting with his head in her lap, they drove home as fast as the old horse could step out.

In the mean time Marion had got her best room ready, and warm. When they reached it, Francie was certainly still alive, and they made haste to lay him in the hot feather-bed. In about an hour they thought he swallowed a little milk. Neither Kirsty nor her parents went to bed that night, and by one or other of them the patient was constantly attended.

Kirsty took the first watch, and was satisfied that

his breathing grew more regular, and by and by stronger. After a while it became like that of one in a troubled sleep. He moved his head a little, and murmured like one dreaming painfully. She called her father, and told him he was saying words she could not understand. He took her place, and sat near him, when presently his soldier-ears still sharp, heard indications of a hot siege. Once he started up on his elbow, and put his hand to the side of his head. For a moment he looked wildly awake, then sank back and went to sleep again.

As Marion was by him in the morning, all at once he spoke again, and more plainly.

"Go away, mother!" he said. "I am not mad. I am only troubled in my mind. I will tell my father you killed me."

Marion tried to rouse him, telling him his mother should not come near him. He did not seem to understand, but apparently her words soothed him, for he went to sleep once more.

He was gaunt and ghastly to look at. The scar on his face, which Kirsty had taken for the mark of her whip, but which was left by the splinter that woke him, remained red and disfiguring. But the worst of his look was in his eyes, whose glances wandered about uneasy and searching. It was clear all was not right with his brain. I doubt if any other of his tenants would have recognized him.

For a good many days he was like one awake yet dreaming, always dreading something, invariably starting when the door opened, and when quietest would lie gazing at the one by his bedside as if puzzled. He took in general what food they brought

him, but at times refused it quite. They never left him alone for more than a moment.

So far were they from giving him up to his mother, that the mere idea of letting her know he was with them never entered the mind of one of them. To the doctor, whom at once they had called in, there was no need to explain the right by which they constituted themselves his guardians: any one would have judged it better for him to be with them than with her. David said to himself that when Francie wanted to leave them he should go; but he had sought refuge with them, and he should have it: nothing should make him give him up except legal compulsion.

CHAPTER XXXV

FRANCIS COMES TO HIMSELF

ONE morning, Kirsty sitting beside him, Francis started to his elbow as if to get up, then seeing her, lay down again with his eyes fixed upon her. She glanced at him now and then, but would not seem to notice him much. He gazed for two or three minutes, and then said, in a low, doubtful, almost timid voice,

"Kirsty?"

"Ay; what is't, Francie?" returned Kirsty.

"Is't yersel, Kirsty?" he said.

"Ay, wha ither, Francie!"

"Are ye angry at me, Kirsty?"

"No a grain. What gars ye speir sic a queston?"

"Eh, but ye gae me sic a ane wi' yer whup—jist here upo the haffit! Luik."

He turned the side of his head toward her, and stroked the place, like a small, self-pitying child. Kirsty went to him, and kissed it like a mother. She had plainly perceived that such a scar could not be from her blow, but it added grievously to her pain at the remembrance of it that the poor head which she had struck, had in the very same place been torn by a splinter—for so the doctor said. If her whip left any mark, the splinter had obliterated it.

"And syne," he resumed, "ye ca'd me a cooard!"

"Did I du that, ill wuman 'at I was!" she returned, with tenderest maternal soothing.

He laid his arms round her neck, drew her feebly toward him, hid his head on her bosom, and wept.

Kirsty put her arm round him, held him closer, and stroked his head with her other hand, murmuring words of much meaning though little sense. He drew back his head, looked at her beseechingly, and said,

"*Div* ye think me a cooard, Kirsty?"

"No wi' men," answered the truthful girl, who would not lie even in ministration to a mind diseased.

"Maybe ye think I oucht to hae strucken ye back whan ye strack me? I *wull* be a cooard than, lat ye say what ye like. I never did, and I never will hit a lassie, lat her kill me!"

"It wasna that, Francie. Gien I ca'd ye a cooard, it was 'at ye behaved sae ill to Phemy."

"Eh, the bonny little Phemy! I had 'maist forgotten her! Hoo is she, Kirsty?"

"She's weel—and verra weel," answered Kirsty; "she's deid."

"Deid!" echoed Gordon with a cry, again raising himself on his elbow. "Surely it wasna—it wasna 'at the puir wee thing cudna forget me! The thing's no possible! I wasna worth it!"

"Na, na; it wasna ae grain that! Her deein had naething to du wi that—nor wi you in ony w'y. I dinna believe she was a hair waur for ony nonsense ye said til her—shame o' ye as it was! She dee'd upo' the Horn, ae awfu' tempest o' a nicht. She cudna hae suffert lang, puir thing! She hadna the stren'th to suffer muckle. Sae awa she gaed!—and

Steenie efter her!" added Kirsty in a lower tone, but Francis did not seem to hear, and said no more for a while.

"But I maun tell ye the trowth, Kirsty," he resumed: "forby yersel, there's them 'at says I'm a cooard!"

"I h'ard ae man say't, only ane, and him only ance."

"And ye said til 'im, 'Ay, I hae lang kenned that!'"

"I tellt him whaever said it was a leear!"

"But ye believt it yersel, Kirsty!"

"Wad ye hae me leear and hypocrite forby, to ca' fowk ill names for sayin what I believt mysel!"

"But I *am* a cooard, Kirsty!"

"Ye are *not*, Francie. I wunna believe't though yersel say 't! It's naething but a dist o' styte and nonsense 'at's won in throu the cracks ye got i' yer heid, fechtin. Ye was aye a daft kin' o' a cratur, Francie! Gien onybody ever said it, mak ye speed and get yer health again, and syne ye can shaw him plain 'at he's a leear."

"But I tell ye, Kirsty, I ran awa!"

"I fancy ye wud hae been naething but a muckle idiot gien ye hadna!—Ye didna ley onybody in trouble!—did ye noo?"

"No a sowl 'at I ken o'. Na, I didna do that. The fac was—but nae blame to them—they a' gaed awa and left me my lane, sleepin. I maun hae been terrible tired!"

"I telled ye sae!" cried Kirsty. "Jist gang ower the story to me, Francie, and I s' tell ye whether ye're a cooard or no. I dinna believe a stime o' 't! Ye never was, and never was likely to be a

cooard. I s' be at the boddom o' 't wi' whaever daur threpe me sic a lee!"

But Francis showed such signs of excitement as well as exhaustion, that Kirsty saw she must not let him talk longer.

"Or I'll tell ye what!" she added; "—ye'll tell father and mother and me the haill tale, this verra nicht, or maybe the morn's mornin. Ye maun hae an egg noo, and a drappy o' milk—creamy milk, Francie! Ye aye likit that!"

She went and prepared the little meal, and after taking it he went to sleep.

In the evening with the help of their questioning, he told them everything he could recall from the moment he woke to find the place abandoned, not omitting his terrors on the way, until he overtook the rear of the garrison.

"I dinna won'er ye war fleyt, Francie," said Kirsty. "I wud hae been fleyt mysel, wantin my swoord, and kennin nae God to trust til! Ye maun learn to ken *him*, Francie, and syne ye'll be feart at naething!"

After that, his memory was only of utterly confused shapes, many of which must have been fancies. The only things he could report were the conviction pervading them all that he had disgraced himself, and the consciousness that every one treated him as a deserter, and gave him the cold shoulder.

His next recollection was of coming home to, or rather finding himself with his mother, who, the moment she saw him, flew into a rage, struck him in the face, and called him coward. She must have taken him, he thought, to some place where there were

people about him who would not let him alone, but he could remember nothing more until he found himself creeping into a hole which he seemed to know, thinking he was a fox with the hounds after him.

"What 's my claes like, Kirsty?" he asked at this point.

"They war no that gran'," answered Kirsty, her eyes smarting with the coming tears; "but ye'll ne'er see a stick (*stitch*) o' them again: I pat them awa."

"What w'y 'ill I win up, wantin' them?" he rejoined, with a tremor of anxiety in his voice.

"We'll see aboot that, time eneuch," answered Kirsty.

"But my mither may be efter me! I wud fain be up! There's no sayin what she michtna be up til! She canna bide me!"

"Dreid ye naething, Francie. Ye're no a match for my leddy, but I s' be atween ye and her. She's no sae fearsome as she thinks! Onygait, she disna fleg *me*."

"I left some guid eneuch claes there whan I gaed awa, and I daur say they're i' my room yet—gien I only kenned hoo to win at them!"

"I s' gang and get them til ye—the verra day ye're fit to rise. But ye mauna speyk a word mair the nicht."

CHAPTER XXXVI

KIRSTY BESTIRS HERSELF

THEY held a long consultation that night as to what they must do. Plainly the first and most important thing was to rid Francis of the delusion that he had disgraced himself in the eyes of his fellow-officers. This would at once wake him as from a bad dream to the reality of his condition: convinced of the unreality of the idea that possessed him, he would at once, they believed, resume his place in the march of his generation through life. To find means, then, for the attainment of this end, they set their wits to work: and it was almost at once clear to David that the readiest way would be to enter into communication with any they could reach of the officers under whom he had served. His regiment having by this time, however, with the rest of the Company's soldiers, passed into the service of the Queen, a change doubtless involving many other changes concerning which Francis, even were he fit to be questioned, could give no information: David resolved to apply to sir Haco Macintosh, who had succeeded Archibald Gordon in the command, for assistance in finding those who could bear the testimony he desired to possess.

"Divna ye think, father," said Kirsty, "it wud be

the surest and speediest w'y for me to gang mysel to sir Haco?"

"'Deed it wud be that, Kirsty!" answered David. "There's naething like the bodily presence o' the leevin sowl to gar things gang!"

To this Marion, although at first not a little appalled at the thought of Kirsty alone in such a huge city as Edinburgh, could not help assenting, and the next morning Kirsty started, bearing a letter from her father to his old officer, in which he begged for her the favor of a few minutes' conference on business concerning her father and the son of the late colonel Gordon.

Sir Haco had retired from the service some years before the mutiny, and was living in one of the serenely gloomy squares of the Scots capital. Kirsty left her letter at the door, and calling the next day, was shown into the library, where lady Macintosh as well as sir Haco awaited, with curious and kindly interest, the daughter of the man they had known so well, and respected so much.

When Kirsty entered the room, dressed very simply in a gown of dark cloth and a plain straw bonnet, the impression she at once made was more than favorable, and they received her with a kindness and courtesy that made her feel herself welcome. They were indeed of her own kind.

Sir Haco was one of the few men who, regarding constantly the reality, not the show of things, keep throughout their life, however long, great part of their youth, and all their childhood. Deeper far in his heart than any of the honors he had received, all unsought but none undeserved, lay the memory of a

happy and reverential boyhood. Sprung from a peasant stock, his father was a man of "high-erected thought seated in a heart of courtesy."

He was well matched with his wife, who, though born to a far higher social position in which simplicity is rarer was, like him, true and humble and strong. They had one daughter, who grew up only to die: the moment they saw Kirsty, their hearts went out to her.

For there was in Kirsty that unassumed, unconscious dignity, that simple propriety, that naturalness of a carriage neither trammelled nor warped by thought of self, which at once awakes confidence and regard; while her sweet, unaffected "book English" in which appeared no attempt at speaking like a fine lady, no disastrous endeavor to avoid her country's utterance, revealed at once her genuine cultivation. Sir Haco said afterward that when she spoke Scotch it was good and thorough, and when she spoke English it was Wordsworthian.

Listening to her first words, and reminded of the solemn sententious way in which sergeant Barclay used to express himself, his face rose clear in his mind's eye, he saw it as it were reflected in his daughter's, and broke out with—

"Eh, lassie, but ye're like yer father!"

"Ye min' upon him, sir?" rejoined Kirsty, with her perfect smile.

"Min' upon him! Naebody worth *his* min'in upo' could ever forget him! Sit ye doon, and tell 's a' aboot him!"

Kirsty did as she was told. She began at the beginning, and explained first, what doubtless sir Haco

knew at least something of before, the relation between her father and colonel Gordon, whence his family as well as himelf had always felt it their business to look after the young laird. Then she told how, after a long interval, during which they could do nothing, a sad opportunity had at length been given them of at least attempting to serve him; and it was for aid in this attempt that she now sought sir Haco, who could direct her toward the procuring of certain information.

"And what sort of information do you think I can give or get for you, Miss Barclay?" asked sir Haco.

"I'll explain the thing to ye, sir, in as feow words as I can," answered Kirsty, dropping her English. "The young laird has taen't intil his heid that he didna carry himsel like a man i' the siege, and it's grown to be in him what they ca' a fixt idea. He was left, ye see, sir, a' himlane i' the beleaguert toon, and I fancy the suddent waukin and the discovery that he was there his lee lane, jist pat him beside himsel."

Here she told the whole story, as they had gathered it from Francis, mingling it with some elucidatory suggestions of her own, and having ended her narration, went on thus:—

"Ye see, sir, and my leddy, he was little better nor a laddie, and fowk 'at sair needs company, like Francie, misses company ower sair. Men's no able —*some* men, my leddy—to tak coonsel wi' their ain herts, as women whiles learns to du. And sae, whan he cam oot o' the fricht, he was ower sair upon himsel for bein i' the fricht. For it seems to me there's no

shame in bein frichtit, sae lang as ye dinna serve and obey the fricht, but trust in him 'at sees, and du what ye hae to du. Naebody 'at kenned Francie as I did, cud ever believe he faun' mair fear in's hert nor was lawfu' and rizzonable—sae lang, that is, as he was in his richt min'; ayont that nane but his makar can jeedge him. I dinna mean Francie was a pettern, but, sir, he was no cooard—and that I ken, for I'm no cooard mysel, please God to keep me as he's made me. But the laddie—the man, I suld say—he's no to be persuaudit oot o' the fancy o' his ain cooardice; and I dinna believe he'll ever win oot o' 't wantin the testimony o' his fellow-officers, wha o' them may be left to grant the same. And I canna but think, gien ye'll excuse me, sir, that, for his father's sake, it wud be a gracious ac' to tak him intil the queen's service, and lat him haud on fechtin for's country, whaurever it may please her mejesty to want him.—Oot whaur he was afore, micht be best for him—I dinna ken. It wad be to put his country's seal upo' their word."

"Surely, Miss Barclay, you wouldn't set the poor lad in the forefront of danger again!" said lady Macintosh.

"I wud that, my lady! I canna but think the airmy, savin for this misadventur—gien there be ony sic thing as misadventur—hed a fair chance o' makin a man o' Francie; and whiles I canna help doobtin gien onything less 'ill ever restore him til himsel but restorin him til's former position. It wud onygait gie him the best chance o' shawin til himsel 'at there wasna a hair o' the cooard upon him."

"But," said sir Haco, "would her majesty be

justified in taking the risk involved? Would it not be to peril many for a doubtful good to one?"

Kirsty was silent for one moment, with downcast eyes.

"I'm answert, sir—as to that p'int," she said, looking up.

"For my part," said lady Macintosh, "I can't help thinking that the love of a good woman like yourself must do more for the poor fellow than the approval of all the soldiers in the world.—Pardon me, Haco."

"Indeed, my lady, you're perfectly right!" returned her husband with a smile.

But lady Macintosh hardly heard him, so startled, almost so frightened was she at the indignation instantly on Kirsty's countenance.

"Putna things intil ony heid, my leddy, 'at the hert wud never put there. It wad be an ill fulfillin o' my father's duty til his auld colonel, no to say his auld frien, to coontenance sic a notion!"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Barclay; I was wrong to venture the remark. But may I say in excuse, that it is not unnatural to imagine a young woman, doing so much for a young man, just a little bit in love with him?"

"I wud fain hae yer leddyship un'erstan'," returned Kirsty, "that my father, my mother, and mysel, we're jist ane and nae mair. No ane o' 's hes a wuss that disna belang to a' three. The langest I can min', it's been my ae ambition to help my father and mother to du what they wantit. I never desirit merriage, my leddy, and gien I did, it wudna be wi sic as Francie Gordon, weel as I lo'e him, for we war bairnies, and laddie and lassie thegither: I

wudna hae a man it was for me to fin' faut wi' ! 'Deed, mem, what fowk ca's love, hes neither airt nor pairt i' this metter!"

Not to believe the honest glow in Kirsty's face, and the clear confident assertion of her eyes, would have shown a poor creature in whom the faculty of belief was undeveloped.

Sir Haco and lady Macintosh insisted on Kirsty's taking up her abode with them while she was in Edinburgh; and Kirsty, partly in the hope of expediting the object of her mission thereby, and partly because her heart was drawn to her new friends, gladly consented. Before a week was over, like understanding like, her hostess felt as if she were a daughter until now long waiting for her somewhere in the infinite.

The self-same morning, sir Haco sat down to his study-table, and began writing to every officer alive who had served with Francis Gordon, requesting to know his feeling, and that of the regiment about him. Within three days he received the first of the answers which kept dropping in for the next six months. They all described Gordon as rather a scatterbrain, as not the less a favorite with officers and men, and as always showing the courage of a man, or rather of a boy, seeing he not unfrequently acted with a reprehensible recklessness that smacked a little of display.

"That's Francie himsel!" cried Kirsty, with the tears in her eyes, when her host read, to this effect, the first result of his inquiry.

Within a fortnight he received also, from one high in office, the assurance that, if Mr. Gordon, on his

recovery, wished to enter her majesty's service, he should have his commission.

While her husband was thus kindly occupied, lady Macintosh was showing Kirsty every loving attention she could think of, and, in taking her about Edinburgh and its neighborhood, found that the country girl knew far more of the history of Scotland than she did herself.

She would gladly have made her acquainted with some of her friends, but Kirsty shrank from the proposal: she could never forget how her hostess had herself misinterpreted the interest she took in Francie Gordon. As soon as she felt that she could do so without seeming ungrateful, she bade her new friends farewell, and hastened home, carrying with her copies of the answers which sir Haco had up to that time received.

When she arrived it was with such a glad heart that, at sight of Francis in her father's Sunday clothes, she laughed so merrily that her mother said "The lassie maun be fey!" Haggard as he looked, the old twinkle awoke in his eye responsive to her joyous amusement; and David, coming in the next moment from putting up the gray mare with which he had met the coach to bring Kirsty home, saw them all three laughing in such an abandonment of mirth as, though unaware of the immediate motive, he could not help joining.

The same evening Kirsty went to the castle, and Mrs. Bremner needed no persuasion to find the suit which the young laird had left in his room, and give it to her to carry to its owner; so that, when he woke the next morning, Francis saw the gray gar-

ments lying by his bed-side in place of David's black, and felt the better for the sight.

The letters Kirsty had brought, working along with returning health, and the surrounding love and sympathy most potent of all, speedily dispelled his yet lingering delusion. It had occasionally returned in force while Kirsty was away, but now it left him altogether.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A GREAT GULF

It was now midsummer, and Francis Gordon was well, though thin and looking rather delicate. Kirsty and he had walked together to the top of the Horn, and there sat, in the heart of old memories. The sun was clouded above; the boggy basin lay dark below, with its rim of heathery hills not yet in bloom, and its bottom of peaty marsh, green and black, with here and there a shining spot; the growing crops of the far-off farms on the other side but little affected the general impression the view gave of a waste world; yet the wide expanse of heaven and earth lifted the heart of Kirsty with an indescribable sense of presence, purpose, promise. For was it not the country on which, fresh from God, she first opened the eyes of this life, the visible region in which all her efforts had gone forth, in which all the food of her growth had been gathered, in which all her joys had come to her, in which all her loves had had their scope, the place whence by and by she would go away to find her brother with the bonny man!

Francis saw without heeding. His heart was not uplifted. His earthly future, a future of his own imagining, drew him.

"This winna du ony langer, Kirsty!" he said at

length. "The accusin angel 'ill be upo' me again or I ken! I maunna be idle 'cause I'm happy ance mair—thanks to you, Kirsty! Little did I think ever to raise my heid again! But noo I maun be at my wark! I'm fit eneuch!"

"I'm richt glaid to hear 't!" answered Kirsty. "I was jist thinkin lang for a word o' the sort frae ye, Francie. I didna want to be the first to speyk o' 't!"

"And I was jist thinkin lang to hear ye speyk o' 't!" returned Francis. "I wantit to du 't as the thing ye wad hae o' me!"

"Even than, Francie, ye wudna, it seems, hae been duin 't to please me, and that pleases me weel! I wud be nane pleast to think ye duin 't for me! It wud gie me a sair hert, Francie!"

"What for that, Kirsty?"

"'Cause it wud shaw ye no a man yet! A man's a man 'at dis what's richt, what's pleasin to the verra hert o' richt. Ye'll please me best by no wantin to please me; and ye'll please God best by duin what he's putten intil yer hert as the richt thing, and the bonny thing, and the true thing, though ye suld dee i' the duin o' 't—Tell me what ye're thinkin o' duin."

"What but gaein efter this new commission they hae promised me? There's aye a guid chance o' fechtin upo' the borders—the frontiers, as they ca' them!"

Kirsty sat silent. She had been thinking much of what Francis ought to do, and had changed her mind on the point since the time when she talked about him with sir Haco.

"Isna that what ye wud hae me du, Kirsty?" he said, when he found she continued silent. "A body's no a fule for wantin guid advice!"

"Na, that's true eneuch! —What for wad ye want to gang fechtin?"

"To shaw the warl' I'm nane o' what my mither ca'd me."

"And shawn that, hoo muckle the better man wud ye be for't? Min' ye it's ae thing to be, and anither to shaw. *Be* ye maun; *shaw* ye needna."

"I dinna ken; I micht be growin better a' the time!"

"And ye micht be growin waur.—What the better wud ony neebor be for ye gane fechtin? Wudna it be a' for yersel? Is there naething gien intil yer han' to du—naething nearer hame nor that? Surely o' twa things, ane near and ane far, the near comes first!"

"I dinna ken. I thoucht ye wantit me to gang!"

"Ay, raither nor bide at hame duin naething; but michtna there be something better to du?"

"I dinna ken. I thoucht to please ye, Kirsty, but it seems naething wull!"

"Ay; that's waur the mischief lies: ye thoucht to please *me!*"

"I did think to please you, Kirsty! I thoucht, ance dune weel afore the warl' as my father did, I micht hae the face to come hame to you, and say—'Kirsty, wull ye hae me?'"

"Aye the same auld Francie!" said Kirsty, with a deep sigh.

"Weel?"

"I tell ye, Francie, i' the name o' God, I'll never

hae ye on nae sic terms!—Suppose I was to merry somebody whan ye was awa pruvin to yersel, and a' the lave 'at never misdoobted ye, 'at ye was a brave man—what wud ye du whan ye cam hame?"

"Naething o' mortal guid! Tak to the drink, maybe."

"Ye tell me that! and ye think, wi' my een open to ken 'at ye say true, I wud merry ye?—a man like you! Eh, Francie, Francie! ye're no worth my takin, and ye're no like to be worth the takin o' ony honest wuman!—Can ye possibly imegine a wuman merryin a man 'at she kenned wud drive her to coontless petitions to be hauden ohn despisit him? Ye mak my hert unco sair, Francie! I hae dune my best wi' ye, and the en' o' 't is, 'at ye're no worth naething."

"For the life o' me, Kirsty, I dinna ken what ye're drivin at, or what ye wud hae o' me! I canna but think ye're usin me as ye wudna like to be used yersel!"

"'Deed I wud not like it gien I was o' your breed, Francie! Man, did ye never ance i' yer life think what ye *hed* to du—what was gien ye to du—what it was yer duty to du?"

"No sae aften, doobtless, as I oucht. But I'm ready to hear ye tell me my duty; I'm no past reasonin wi'!"

"Did ye never hear 'at ye're to lo'e yer neebor as yersel?"

"I'm duin that wi' a' my hert, Kirsty—and that ye ken as weel as I du mysel!"

"Ye mean me, Francie! And ye ca' that lo'in me, to wull me merry a man 'at's no a man ava! But it's nae me 'at's yer neebor, Francie!"

"Wha *is* my neebor, Kirsty?"

"The queston's been speirt afore—and answert."

"And what's the answer til't?"

"'At yer neebor 's jist whaever lies neist ye i' need o' yer help. Gien ye read the tale o' the guid Sameritan wi' ony sort o' gumption, that's what ye'll read intil't and noucht else. The man or wuman ye can help, ye hae to be neebor til."

"I want to help you."

"Ye canna help me. I'm in no need o' yer help. And the queston's no whaur's the man I *micht* help, but whaur's the man I *maun* help. I wantit to be *your* neebor but I cudna win at ye for the thieves; ye *wad* stick to them, and they wudna lat me du naething."

"What thieves, i' the name o' common sense, Kirsty?"

"Love o' yer ain gait, and love o' makin a show, and want o' care for what's richt. Aih, Francie, I doobt something a heap waur 'll hae to come upo' ye! A' my labor's lost, and I dearly grudge it—no the labor, but the loss o' 't! I grudge that sair."

"Kirsty, i' the name o' God, wha *is* my neebor?"

"Yer ain mither."

"My ain mither!—*her* oot o' a' the warl'?—I never cam upo' spark o' rizzon intil her!"

"Michtna she be that ane oot a' the warl', ye never shawed spark o' rizzon til?"

"There's nae place in her for reason to gang til!"

"Ye never tried her wi' 't! Ye wud arguy wi' her mair nor plenty, but did ye ever shaw her rizzon i' yer behavior?"

"Weel ye *are* turnin agen me—you 'at's saved my

life frae her! Didna I tell you hoo, whan I wan hame at last and gaed til her, for she was aye guid to me whan I wasna weel, she fell oot upo' me like a verra deevil, ragin and ca'in me ill names, 'at I jist ran frae the hoose—and ye ken whaur ye faun' me! Gien it hadna been for you, I wud hae been deid: I was waur nor deid a'ready! What w'y *can* I be neebor to *her!* It wud be naething but cat and dog atween's frae mornin to nicht!"

"Ae body canna be cat and dog baith! And the dog's as ill's the cat—whiles waur!"

"Ony dog wud yowl gien ye threw a kettle o' bilin watter ower him!"

"Did she that til ye?"

"She mintit at it. I ran frae her. She hed the toddy-kettle in her han', and she splasht it in her ain face tryin to fling't at me."

"Maybe she didna ken ye!"

"She kenned me weel eneuch. She ca'd me by my ain as weel's ither names."

"Yere jist croonin my arguyment, Francie! Yer mither's just perishin o' drink! She drinks and drinks, and, by what I hear, cares for noucht else. A' 's upo' the ro'd to ruin in her and aboot her. She hasna the brains noo, gien ever she hed them, to guide hersel. Is Satan to grip her 'cause ye winna be neebor til her and haud him aff o' her? I ken ye're a guid son sae far as lat her du as she likes and tak 'maist a' the siller, but that's what greases the exle o' the cairt the deevil's gotten her intil! I ken weel she hesna been muckle o' a mither til ye, but ye're her son whan a' 's said. And there can be naething ye're callt upon to du, sae lang as she's

i' the grup o' the enemy, but rugg her oot o' 't. Gien ye dinna that, ye'll never be oot o' 's grup yersel. Ye come oot thegither, or ye bide thegither."

Gordon sat speechless.

"It's *im*possible!" he said at length.

"Francie," rejoined Kirsty, very quietly and solemnly, "ye're yer mother's keeper; ye're her neist neebor: are ye gaein to du yer duty by her, or are ye not?"

"I canna; I daurna; I'm a cooard afore her."

"Gien ye lat her gang on to disgrace yer father, no to say yersel—and that by means o' what's yours and no hers, I'll say mysel 'at ye're a cooard."

"Come hame wi' me and tak my pairt, and I'll promise ye to du my best."

"Ye maun tak yer ain pairt; and ye maun tak her pairt tu against hersel."

"It's no to be thoucht o', Kirsty!"

"Ye winna?"

"I canna my lane. I winna try't. It wud be waur nor useless."

Kirsty rose, turning her face homeward. Gordon sprang to his feet. She was already three yards from him.

"Kirsty! Kirsty!" he cried, going after her.

She went straight for home, never showing by turn of head, by hesitation of step, or by change of carriage, that she heard his voice or his feet behind her.

When they had thus gone two or three hundred yards, he quickened his pace, and laid his hand on her arm.

She stopped and faced him. He dropped his hand, grew yet whiter, and said not a word. She

walked on again. Like one in a dream he followed, his head hanging, his eyes on the heather. She went on faster. He was falling behind her, but did not know it. Down and down the hill he followed, and only at the earth-house lifted his head: she was nearly over the opposite brae! He had let her go! He might yet have overtaken her, but he knew that he had lost her.

He had no home, no refuge! Then first, not when alone in the beleaguered city, he knew desolation. He had never knocked at the door of heaven, and earth had closed hers! An angel who needed no flaming sword to make her awful, held the gate of his lost paradise against him. None but she could open to him, and he knew that, like God himself, Kirsty was inexorable. Left alone with that last terrible look from the eyes of the one being he loved, he threw himself in despair on the ground. True love is an awful thing, not to the untrue only, but sometimes to the growing-true, for to everything that can be burned it is a consuming fire. Never more, it seemed, would those eyes look in at his soul's window without that sad, indignant repudiation in them! He rose, and crept into the earth-house.

Kirsty lost herself in prayer as she went. "Lord, I hae dune a' I can!" she said. "Until thou hast dune something by thysel, I can du naething mair. He's i' thy han's still, I praise thee, though he's oot o' mine! Lord, gien I hae dune him ony ill, forgie me; a puir human body canna ken aye the best! Dinna lat him suffer for my ignorance, whether I be to blame for't or no. I will try to do whatever thou makest plain to me."

By the time she reached home she was calm. Her mother saw and respected her solemn mood, gave her a mother's look, and said nothing: she knew that Kirsty, lost in her own thoughts, was in good company.

What was passing in the soul of Francis Gordon, I can only indicate, I cannot show. The most mysterious of all vital movements, a generation, a transition, was there—how initiated, God only knows. Francis knew neither whence it came nor whither it went. He was being re-born from above. The change was in himself; the birth was that of his will. It was his own highest action, therefore all God's. He was passing from death into life, and knew it no more than the babe knows that he is being born. The change was into a new state of being, of the very existence of which most men are incredulous, for it is beyond preconception, capable only of being experienced. Thorough as is the change, the man knows himself the same man, and yet would rather cease to be, than return to what he was. The unknown germ in him, the root of his being, yea, his very being itself, the holy thing which is his intrinsic substance, hitherto unknown to his consciousness, has begun to declare itself, and the worm is passing into the butterfly, the creeping thing into the Psyche. It is a change in which God is the potent presence, but which the man must *will*, or remain the jailer who prisons in loathsomeness his own God-born self, and chokes the fountain of his own liberty.

Francis knew nothing of all this; he only felt, he must knock at the door behind which Kirsty lived. Kirsty could not open the door to him, but there

was one who could, and Francis could knock! "God help me!" he cried, as he lay on his face to live, where once he had lain on his face to die. For the rising again is the sepulchre. The world itself is one vast sepulchre for the heavenly resurrection. We are all busy within the walls of our tomb burying our dead, that the corruptible may perish, and the incorruptible go free. Francis Gordon came out of that earth-house a risen man: his will was born. He climbed again to the spot where Kirsty and he had sat together, and there, with the vast clear heaven over his head, threw himself once more on his face, and lifted up his heart to the heart whence he came.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE NEIGHBORS

He had eaten nothing since the morning, and felt like one in a calm ethereal dream as he walked home to Weelset in the soft dusk of an evening that would never be night, but die into the day. No one saw him enter the house, no one met him on the ancient spiral stair, as, with apprehensive anticipation, he sought the drawing-room.

He had just set his foot on the little landing by its door when a wild scream came from the room. He flung the door open and darted in. His mother rushed into his arms, enveloped from foot to head in a cone of fire. She was making, in wild flight, for the stair, to reach which would have been death to her. Francis held her fast, but she struggled so wildly that he had actually to throw her on the floor ere he could do anything to deliver her. Then he flung on her the rug, the table-cover, his coat, and one of the window-curtains, tearing it fiercely from the rings. Having got all these close around her, he rang the bell with an alarm-peal, but had to ring three times, for service in that house was deadened by frequent fury of summons. Two of the maids—there was no man-servant in the house now—laid their mistress on a mattress and carried her to her room. Gordon's hands and arms were so severely burned

that he could do nothing beyond directing: he thought he had never felt pain before.

The doctor was sent for, and came speedily. Having examined them, he said Mrs. Gordon's injuries would have caused him no anxiety but for her habits: their consequences might be very serious, and every possible care must be taken of her.

Disabled as he was, Francis sat by her till the morning; and the night's nursing did far more for himself than for his mother. For, as he saw how she suffered, and interpreted her moans by what he had felt and was still feeling in his own hands and arms, a great pity awoke in him. What a lost life his mother's had been! Was this to be the end of it? The old kindness she had shown him in his childhood and youth, especially when he was in any bodily trouble, came back upon him, and a new love, gathering up in it all the intermittent love of days long gone by, sprang to life in his heart, and he saw that the one thing given him to do was to deliver his mother.

The task seemed, if not easy, yet far from irksome, so long as she continued incapable of resisting, annoying, or deceiving him; but the time speedily came when he perceived that the continuous battle rather than war of duty and inclination must be fought and in some measure won in himself ere he could hope to stir up any smallest skirmish of sacred warfare in the soul of his mother. What added to the acerbities of this preliminary war was, that the very nature of the contest required actions which showed not only unbecoming in a son, but mean and disgraceful in themselves. There was no pride, pomp, or circum-

stance of glorious war in this poor, domestic strife, this seemingly sordid and unheroic, miserably unheroic, yet high, eternal contest! But now that Francis was awake to his duty, the best of his nature awoke to meet its calls, and he drew upon a growing store of love for strength to thwart the desires of her he loved. "Entire affection hateth nicer hands," and Francis learned not to mind looking penurious and tyrannical, selfish, heartless, and unsympathetic, in the endeavor to be truly loving and lovingly true. He had not Kirsty to support him, but he could now go higher than to Kirsty for the help he needed; he went to the same fountain from which Kirsty herself drew her strength. At the same time frequent thought of her filled him with glad assurance of her sympathy, which was in itself a wondrous aid. He neither saw nor sought to see her: he would not go near her before at least she already knew from other sources what would give her the hope that he was trying to do right.

The gradually approaching strife between mother and son burst out the same moment in which the devilish thirst awoke to its cruel tyranny. It was a mercy to both of them that it re-asserted itself while yet the mother was helpless toward any indulgence of her passion. Francis was no longer afraid of her, but it was the easier because of her condition, although not the less painful for him to frustrate her desire. Neither did it make it the less painful that already her countenance, which the outward fire had not half so much disfigured as that which she herself had applied inwardly, had begun to remind him of the face he had long ago loved a little, but this only

made him if possible, yet more determined that not one shilling of his father's money should go to the degradation of his mother. That she lusted and desired to have, was the worst of reasons why she should obtain! A compelled temperance was of course in itself worthless, but that alone could give opportunity for the waking of what soul was left her. Puny as it was, that might then begin to grow; it might become aware of the bondage to which it had been subjected, and begin to long for liberty.

In carrying out his resolution, Francis found it specially hard to fight, along with the bad in his mother, the good in himself: the lower forms of love rose against the higher, and had to be put down. To see the scintillation of his mother's eyes at the sound of any liquid, and know how easily he could give her an hour of false happiness, tore his heart, while her fierce abuse hardly passed the portals of his brain. Her condition was so pitiful that her words could not make him angry. She would declare it was he who set her clothes on fire, and as soon as she was up again she would publish to the world what a coward and sneak he showed himself from morning to night. Had Francis been what he once was, his mother and he must soon have come as near absolute hatred as is possible to the human; but he was now so different that the worst answer he ever gave her was,

"Mother, you *know* you don't mean it!"

"I mean it with all my heart and soul, Francis," she replied, glaring at him.

He stooped to kiss her on the forehead. She struck him on the face so that the blood sprang. He

went back a step, and stood looking at her sadly as he wiped it away.

"Crying!" she said. "You always were a coward, Francis!"

But the word had no more any sting for him.

"I'm all right mother. My nose got in the way!" he answered, restoring his handkerchief to his pocket.

"It's the doctor puts him up to it!" said Mrs. Gordon to herself. "But we shall soon be rid of him now! If there's any more of this nonsense then, I shall have to shut Francis up again! That will teach him how to behave to his mother!"

When at length Mrs. Gordon was able to go about the house again, it was at once to discover that things were not to be as they had been. Then deepened the combat, and at the same time assumed aspects and occasioned situations which in the eye of the world would have seemed even ludicrously unbecoming. The battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but how much harder and worthier battles are fought, not in shining armor, but amid filth and squalor physical as well as moral, on a field of wretched and wearisome commonplace!

It was essential to success that there should be no traitor among the servants, and Francis had made them understand what his measures were. Nor was there in this any betrayal of a mother's weakness, for Mrs. Gordon's had long been more than patent to all about her. When, therefore, he one day found her, for the first time, under the influence of strong drink, he summoned them, and told them that, sooner

than fail of his end, he would part with the whole household, and should be driven to it if no one revealed how the thing had come to pass. Thereupon the youngest, a mere girl, burst into tears, and confessed that she had procured the whisky. Hardly thinking it possible his mother should have money in her possession, so careful was he to prevent it, he questioned, and found that she had herself provided the half-crown required, and that her mistress had given her in return a valuable brooch, an heirloom, which was hers only to wear, not to give. He took this from her, repaid her the half-crown, gave her her wages up to the next term, and sent Mrs. Bremner home with her immediately. Her father being one of his own tenants, he rode to his place the next morning, laid before him the whole matter, and advised him to keep the girl at home for a year or two.

This one evil success gave such a stimulus to Mrs. Gordon's passion, that her rage which had been abating a little, blazed up at once as fierce as at first. But, miserable as the whole thing was, and trying as he found the necessary watchfulness, Gordon held out bravely. At the end of six months, however, during which no fresh indulgence had been possible to her, he had not gained the least ground for hoping that any poorest growth of strength, or even any waking of desire toward betterment, had taken place in her.

All this time he had not been once to Corbyknowe. He had nevertheless been seeing David Barclay three or four times a week. For Francis had told David how he stood with Kirsty, and how, while refusing

him, she had shown him his duty to his mother. He told him also that he now saw things with other eyes, and was endeavoring to do what was right; but he dared not speak to her on the subject, lest she should think, as she would, after what had passed between them, be well justified in thinking, that he was doing for her sake what ought to be done for its own. He said to him that, as he was no man of business, and must give his best attention to his mother, he found it impossible for the present to acquaint himself with the state of the property, or indeed attend to it in any serviceable manner; and he begged him, as his father's friend and his own, to look into his affairs, and, so far as his other duties would permit, place things on at least a better footing.

To this petition David had at once and gladly consented.

He found everything connected with the property in a sad condition. The agent, although honest, was weak, and had so given way to Mrs. Gordon that much havoc had been made, and much money wasted. He was now in bad health, and had lost all heart for his work. But he had turned nothing to his own advantage, and was quite ready, under David's supervision, to do his best for the restoration of order, and the curtailing of expenses.

All that David now saw in his intercourse with the young laird, went to convince him that he was at length a man of conscience, cherishing steady purposes. He reported at home what he saw, and said what he believed, and his wife and daughter perceived plainly that his heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. Kirsty listened, said little,

asked a question here and there, and thanked God. For her father brought her not only the good news that Francis was doing his best for his mother, but that he had begun to open his eyes to the fact that he had his part in the wellbeing of all on his land; that the property was not his for the filling of his pockets, or for the carrying out of schemes of his own, but for the general and individual comfort and progress.

"I do believe," said David, "the yoong laird wud fain mak o' the lan's o' Weelset a spot whauron the e'en o' the bonny man micht rist as he gaed by!"

Mrs. Gordon's temper seemed for a time to have changed from fierce to sullen, but by degrees she began to show herself not altogether indifferent to the continuous attentions of her inexorable son. It is true she received them as her right, but he yielded her a right immeasurably beyond that she would have claimed. He would play draughts or cribbage with her for hours at a time, and every day for months read to her as long as she would listen—read Scott and Dickens and Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade.

One day, after much entreaty, she consented to go out for a drive with him, when round to the door came a beautiful new carriage, and such a pair of horses as she could not help expressing satisfaction with. Francis told her they were at her command, but if ever she took unfair advantage of them, he would send both carriage and horses away.

She was furious at his daring to speak so to *her*, and had almost returned to her room, but thought better of it and went with him. She did not, however, speak a word to him the whole way. The next

morning he let her go alone. After that, he sometimes went with her, and sometimes not: the desire of his heart was to behold her a free woman.

She was quite steady for a while, and her spirits began to return. The hopes of her son rose high; he almost ceased to fear.

CHAPTER XXXIX

KIRSTY GIVES ADVICE

IT was again midsummer, and just a year since they parted on the Horn, when Francis appeared at Corbyknowe, and found Kirsty in the kitchen. She received him as if nothing had ever come between them, but at once noting he was in trouble, proposed they should go out together. It was a long way to be silent, but they had reached the spot, whence they started for the race recorded in my first chapter, ere either of them said a word.

"Will ye no sit, Kirsty?" said Francis at length.

For answer she dropped on the same stone where she was sitting when she challenged him to it, and Francis took his seat on its neighbor.

"I hae had a some sair time o' 't sin' I shawed ye plain hoo little I was worth yer notice, Kirsty!" he began.

"Ay," returned Kirsty, "but ilka hoor o' 't hes shawn what the rael Francie was!"

"I kenna, Kirsty. A' I can say is—'at I dinna think nearhan sae muckle o' mysel as I did than."

"And I think a heap mair o' ye," answered Kirsty. "I canna but think ye upo' the richt ro'd noo, Francie!"

"I houp I am, but I'm aye fin'in oot something 'at 'ill never du."

"And ye'll keep fin'in oot that sae lang's there's onything left but what's like himsel."

"I un'erstan ye, Kirsty. But I cam to ye the day, no to say onything aboot mysel, but jist 'cause I cudna du wantin yer help. I wudna hae presumed but that I thoucht, although I dinna deserve't, for auld kin'ness ye wud say what ye wud advise."

"I'll du that, Francie—no for auld kin'ness, but for kin'ness never auld. What's wrang wi' ye?"

"Kirsty, wuman, she's brocken oot again!"

"I dinna won'er. I hae h'ard o' sic things."

"It's jist taen the pith oot o' me! What *am* I to du?"

"Ye canna du better nor weel; jist begin again."

"I had coft her a bonny cairriage, wi as fine a pair as ever ye saw, Kirsty, as I daursay yer father has telled ye. And they warna lost upon her, for she had aye a gleg ee for a horse. Ye min' yon powny?—And up til yesterday, a' gaed weel, till I was thinkin I cud trust her onygait. But i' the efternune, as she was oot for an airin, ane o' the horses cuist a shue, and thinkin naething o' the risk til a human sowl, but only o' the risk til the puir horse, the fule fallow stoppit at a smithy nae farrer nor the neist door frae a public, and tuik the horse intil the smithy, lea'in the smith's lad at the heid o' the ither horse. Sae what suld my leddy but oot upo' the side *frae* the smithy, and awa roon the back o' the cairriage to the public, and in! Whether she took onything there I dinna ken, but she maun hae broucht a bottle hame wi her, for this mornin she was fou—fou as e'er ye saw man in market!"

He broke down and wept like a child.

"And what did ye du?" asked Kirsty.

"I said naething. I jist gaed to the coachman and

gart him put his horses tu, and tak his denner wi' him, and m'unt the box, and drive straucht awa til Aberdeen, and lea' the carriage whaur I boucht it, and du siclike wi the horses, and come hame by the co'ch."

As he ended the sad tale, he glanced up at Kirsty, and saw her regarding him with a look such as he had never seen, imagined, or dreamed of before. It lasted but a moment; her eyes dropped, and she went on with the knitting, which, as in the old days, she had brought with her.

"Noo, Kirsty, what am I to du neist?" he said.

"Hae ye naething i' yer ain min'?" she asked.

"Naething."

"Weel, we'll awa hame!" she returned, rising. "Maybe, as we gang, we'll get licht!"

They walked in silence. Now and then Francis would look up in Kirsty's face, to see if anything was coming, but saw only that she was sunk in thought: he would not hurry her, and said not a word. He knew she would speak the moment she had what she thought worth saying.

Kirsty, recalling what her father had repeatedly said of Mrs. Gordon's management of a horse in her young days, had fallen a wondering how one who so well understood the equine nature, could be so incapable of understanding the human; for certainly she had little known either Archibald Gordon or David Barclay, and quite as little her own son. Having come to the conclusion that the incapacity was caused by overpowering affection for the one human creature she ought not to love Kirsty found her thoughts return to the sole faculty her father yielded

Mrs. Gordon—that of riding a horse as he ought to be ridden. Thereupon came to her mind a conclusion she had lately read somewhere—namely, that a man ought to regard his neighbor as specially characterized by the possession of this or that virtue or capacity, whatever it might be, that distinguished him; for that was as the door-plate indicating the proper entrance to his inner house. A moment more and Kirsty thought she saw a way in which Francis might gain a firmer hold on his mother, as well as provide her with a pleasure that might work toward her redemption.

"Francie," she said, "I hae thoucht o' something. My father has aye said, and ye ken he kens, 'at yer mother was a by ord'nar guid rider in her young days, and this is what I wud hae ye du: gang strauch awa, whaurever ye think best, and buy for her the best luikin, best tempered, handiest, and easiest gaein leddy's-horse ye can lay yer han's upo. Ye hae a gey fair beast o' yer ain, my father says, and ye maun jist ride wi' her whaurever she gangs."

"I'll du't, Kirsty. I canna gang straucht awa, I doobt, though; I fear she has whusky left, and there's no sayin what she micht du afore I wan back. I maun gang hame first."

"I'm no clear upo' that. Ye canna weel gang and rype (*search*) a' the kists and aumries i' the hoose she ca's her ain! That wud anger her terrible. Nor can ye weel lay han's upon her, and tak frae her by force. A wuman micht du that, but a man, and special a wuman's ain ae son, canna weel du't—that is, gien there's ony ither coorse 'at can be followt. It seems to me ye maun tak the risk o' her

bottle. And it may be no ill thing 'at she sud disgrace hersel oot and oot. Onygait wi' bein awa, and comin back wi' the horse i' yer han' ye'll come afore her like bringin wi' ye a fresh beginnin, a new order o' things like, and that w'y av'ide words wi' her, and words maun aye be av'idit."

Francis remained in thoughtful silence.

"I hae little fear," pursued Kirsty, "but we'll get her frae the drink a'thegither, and the houp is we may get something better putten intil her. Bein fou whiles, isna the main difficulty. But I beg yer pardon, Francie! I maunna forgot 'at she's your mother!"

"Gien ye wud but tak her and me thegither, Kirsty, it wud be a gran' thing for baith o' 's! Wi' yu to tak the half o' 't, I micht stan' up un'er the weicht o' my responsibility!"

"I'm takin my share o' that, onygait, daurin to advise ye, Francie! — Noo gang, laddie; gang straucht awa and buy the horse."

"I maun rin hame first to put siller i' my pooch! I s' haud oot o' her gait."

"Gang til my faither for't. I haena a penny, but he has aye plenty!"

"I maun hae my horse; there's nae co'ch till the morn's mornin."

"Gangna near the place. My father 'ill gie ye the gray mear—no an ill ane ava! She'll tak ye there in four or five hoors, as *ye* ride. Only min' and gie her a pickle corn ance, and meal and watter twise upo' the ro'd. Gien ye seena the animal ye're sure 'ill please her, gang further, and comena hame wantin't."

CHAPTER XL

MRS. GORDON

WHEN Mrs. Gordon came to herself, she thought to behave as if nothing had happened, and rang the bell to order her carriage. The maid informed her that the coachman had driven away with it before lunch, and had not said where he was going.

"Driven away with it!" cried her mistress, starting to her feet; "I gave him no orders!"

"I saw the laird giein him directions, mem," rejoined the maid.

Mrs. Gordon sat down again. She began to remember what her son had said when first he gave her the carriage.

"Where did he send him?" she asked.

"I dinna ken, mem."

"Go and ask the laird to step this way."

"Please, mem, he's no i' the hoose. I ken, for I saw him gang—hoors ago."

"Did he go in the carriage?"

"No, mem; he gaed upo' 's ain fit."

"Perhaps he's come home by this time!"

"I'm sure he's no that, mem."

Mrs. Gordon went to her room, all but finished the bottle of whisky, and threw herself on her bed.

Toward morning she woke with aching head and miserable mind. Now dozing, now tossing about in

wretchedness, she lay till the afternoon. No one came near her, and she wanted no one.

At length, dizzy and despairing, her head in torture, and her heart sick, she managed to get out of bed, and, unable to walk, literally crawled to the cupboard in which she had put away the precious bottle:—joy! there was yet a glass in it! With the mouth of it to her lips, she was tilting it up to drain the last drop, when the voice of her son came cheerily from the drive, on which her window looked down:

"See what I've brought you, mother!" he called.

Fear came upon her; she took the bottle from her mouth, put it again in the cupboard, and crept back to her bed, her brain like a hive buzzing with devils.

When Francis entered the house, he was not surprised to learn that she had not left her room. He did not try to see her.

The next morning she felt a little better, and had some tea. Still she did not care to get up. She shrank from meeting her son, and the abler she grew to think, the more unwilling she was to see him. He came to her room, but she heard him coming, turned her head the other way, and pretended to be asleep. Again and again, almost involuntarily, she half rose, remembering the last of the whisky, but as often lay down again, loathing the cause of her headache.

Stronger and stronger grew her unwillingness to face her son: she had so thoroughly proved herself unfit to be trusted! She began to feel toward him as she had sometimes felt toward her mother when she had been naughty. She began to see that she could make her peace, with him or with herself, only

by acknowledging her weakness. Aided by her misery, she had begun to perceive that she could not trust herself, and ought to submit to be treated as the poor creature she was. She had resented the idea that she could not keep herself from drink if she pleased, for she knew she could; but she had not pleased! How could she ever ask him to trust her again!

What further passed in her, I cannot tell. It is an unfailing surprise when any one, more especially any one who has hitherto seemed without strength of character, turns round and changes. The only thing Mrs. Gordon then knew as helping her, was the strong hand of her son upon her, and the consciousness that, had her husband lived, she could never have given way as she had. But there was another help which is never wanting where it can find an entrance; and now first she began to pray, "Lead me not into temptation."

There was one excuse which David alone knew to make for her—that her father was a hard drinker, and his father before him.

Doubtless, during all the period of her excesses, the soul of the woman in her better moments, had been ashamed to know her the thing she was. It could not, when she was at her worst, comport with her idea of a lady, poor as that idea was, to drink whisky till she did not know what she did next. And when the sleeping woman God made, wakes up to see in what a house she lives, she will soon grasp at besom and bucket, nor cease her cleansing while spot is left on wall or ceiling or floor.

How the waking comes, who can tell! God knows

what he wants us to do, and what we can do, and how to help us. What I have to tell is that, the next morning, Mrs. Gordon came down to breakfast, and finding her son already seated at the table, came up behind him, without a word set the bottle with the last glass of whisky in it before him, went to her place at the table, gave him one sorrowful look, and sat down.

His heart understood, and answered with a throb of joy so great that he knew it first as pain.

Neither spoke until breakfast was almost over. Then Francis said,

"You've grown so much younger, mother, it is quite time you took to riding again! I've been buying a horse for you. Remembering the sort of pony you bought for me, I thought I should like to try whether I could not please you with a horse of my buying."

"Silly boy!" she returned, with a rather pitiful laugh, "do you suppose at my age I'm going to make a fool of myself on horseback? You forget I'm an old woman!"

"Not a bit of it, mother! If ever you rode as David Barclay says you did, I don't see why you shouldn't ride still. He's a splendid creature! David told me you liked a big fellow. Just put on your habit, mammy, and we'll take a gallop across, and astonish the old man a bit."

"My dear boy, I have no nerve! I'm not the woman I was! It's my own fault, I know, and I'm both sorry and ashamed."

"We are both going to try to be good, mother dear!" faltered Francis.

The poor woman pressed her handkerchief with both hands to her face, and wept for a few moments in silence, then rose and left the room. In an hour she was ready, and out looking for Francis. Her habit was a little too tight for her, but wearable enough. The horses were sent for, and they mounted.

CHAPTER XLI

TWO HORSEWOMEN

THERE was at Corbyknowe a young, well-bred horse which David had himself reared: Kirsty had been teaching him to carry a lady. For her hostess in Edinburgh, discovering that she was fond of riding and that she had no saddle, had made her a present of her own: she had not used it for many years, but it was in very good condition, and none the worse for being a little old-fashioned. That same morning Kirsty had put on a blue riding-habit, which also lady Macintosh had given her, and was out on the highest slope of the farm, hoping to catch a sight of the two on horseback together, and so learn that her scheme was a success. She had been on the outlook for about an hour, when she saw them coming along between the castle and Corbyknowe, and went straight for a certain point in the road so as to reach it simultaneously with them. For she had just spied a chance of giving Gordon the opportunity which her father had told her he was longing for, of saying something about her to his mother.

"Who can that be?" said Mrs. Gordon as they trotted gently along, when she spied the lady on horseback. "She rides well! But she seems to be alone! Is there really nobody with her?"

As she spoke, the young horse came over a *dry-stane-dyke* in fine style.

"Why, she's an accomplished horsewoman!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon. "She must be a stranger! There's not a lady within thirty miles of Weelset can ride like that!"

"No such stranger as you think, mother!" rejoined Francis. "That's Kirsty Barclay of Corbyknowe."

"Never, Francis! The girl rides like a lady!"

Francis smiled, perhaps a little triumphantly. Something like what lay in the smile the mother read in it, for it roused at once both her jealousy and her pride. *Her* son to fall in love with a girl that was not even a lady! A Gordon of Weelset to marry a tenant's daughter! Impossible!

Kirsty was now in the road before them, riding slowly in the same direction. It was the progress however, not the horse that was slow: his frolics, especially when the other horses drew near, kept his rider sufficiently occupied.

Mrs. Gordon quickened her pace, and passed without turning her head or looking at her, but so close, and with so sudden a rush that Kirsty's horse half wheeled, and bounded over the dyke by the roadside. Her rudeness annoyed her son, and he jumped his horse into the field and joined Kirsty, letting his mother ride on, and contenting himself with keeping her in sight. After a few moments' talk, however, he proposed that they should overtake her, and cutting off a great loop of the road, they passed her at speed, and turned and met her. She had by this time got a little over her temper, and was prepared to behave with propriety, which meant—the dignity becoming her.

"What a lovely horse you have, Miss Barclay!"

she said, without other greeting. "How much do you want for him?"

"He is but half-broken," answered Kirsty, "or I would offer to change with you. I almost wonder you look at him from the back of your own!"

"He is a beauty—is he not? This is my first trial of him. The laird gave me him only this morning. He is as quiet as a lamb."

"There, Donal," said Kirsty to her horse, "tak example by yer betters! Jist luik hoo he stan's!—The laird has a true eye for a horse, ma'am," she went on, "but he always says you gave it him."

"Always! hm!" said Mrs. Gordon to herself, but she looked kindly at her son.

"How did you learn to ride so well, Kirsty?" she asked.

"I suppose I got it from my father, ma'am! I began with the cows."

"Ah, how is old David?" returned Mrs. Gordon. "I have seen him once or twice about the castle of late, but have not spoken to him."

"He is very well, thank you.—Will you not come up to the Knowe and rest a moment? My mother will be very glad to see you."

"Not to-day, Kirsty. I haven't been on horseback for years, and am already tired. We shall turn here. Good-morning!"

"Good-morning, ma'am! Good-by, Mr. Gordon!" said Kirsty cheerfully, as she wheeled her horse to set him straight at a steep grassy brae.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LAIRD AND HIS MOTHER

THE laird and his mother sat and looked at Kirsty as her horse tore up the brae.

"She can ride—can't she mother?" said Francis.

"Well enough for a hoiden," answered Mrs. Gordon.

"She rides to please her horse now, but she'll have him as quiet as yours before long," rejoined her son, both a little angry and a little amused at her being called a hoiden who was to him like an angel grown young with æonian life.

"Yes," resumed his mother, as if she *would* be fair, "she does ride well! If only she were a lady that I might ask her to ride with me! After all it's none of my business what she is—so long as *you* don't want to marry her!" she concluded with an attempt at a laugh.

"But I do want to marry her, mother!" rejoined Francis.

A short year before, his mother would have said what was in her heart, and it would not have been pleasant to hear; but now she was afraid of her son, and was silent. But it added to her torture that she must be silent. To be dethroned in castle Weelset by the daughter of one of her own tenants, for as such she thought of them, was indeed galling. "The

impudent quean!" she said to herself, "she's ridden on her horse into the heart of the laird!" But for the wholesome consciousness of her own shame, which she felt that her son was always sparing, she would have raged like a fury.

"You that might have had any lady in the land!" she said at length.

"If I might, mother, it would be just as vain to look for her equal."

"You might at least have shown your mother the respect of choosing a lady to set in her place! You drive me from the house!"

"Mother," said Francis, "I have twice asked Kirsty Barclay to be my wife, and she has twice refused me."

"You may try her again: she had her reasons! she never meant to let you slip! If you got disgusted with her afterward, she would always have her refusal of you to throw in your teeth."

Francis laid his hand on his mother's, and stopped her horse.

"Mother, you compel me!" he said. "When I came home ill, and, as I thought, dying, you called me bad names, and drove me from the house. Kirsty found me in a hole in the earth, actually dying then, and saved my life."

"Good heavens, Francis! Are you mad still? How dare you tell such horrible falsehoods of your own mother? You never came near me! You went straight to Corbyknowe."

"Ask Mrs. Bremner if I speak the truth. She ran out after me, but could not get up with me. You drove me out; and if you do not know it now, you

do not need to be told how it is that you have forgotten it."

She knew what he meant and was silent.

"Then Kirsty went to Edinburgh, to sir Haco Macintosh, and with his assistance brought me to my right mind. If it were not for Kirsty, I should be in my grave, or wandering the earth a maniac. Even alive and well as I am, I should not be with you now had she not shown me my duty."

"I thought as much. All this tyranny of yours, all your late insolence to your mother, comes from the power of that low-born woman over you! I declare to you, Francis Gordon, if you marry her, I will leave the house."

He made her no answer, and they rode the rest of the way in silence. But in that silence things grew clearer to him. Why should he take pains to persuade his mother to a consent which she had no right to withhold? His desire was altogether reasonable: why should its fulfilment depend on the unreason of one who had not strength to order her own behavior? He had to save her not to please her, gladly as he would have done both!

When he had helped her from the saddle, he would have remounted and ridden at once to Corbyknowe, but feared leaving her. She shut herself in her room till she could bear her own company no longer, and then went to the drawing-room, where Francis read to her, and played several games of backgammon with her. Soon after dinner she retired saying the ride had wearied her; and the moment Francis knew she was in bed, he got his horse, and galloped to the Knowe.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CORONATION

WHEN he arrived, there was no light in the house: all had gone to rest. Unwilling to disturb the father and mother, he rode quietly to the back of the house, where Kirsty's room looked on the garden. He called her softly. In a moment she peeped out, then opened her window.

"Cud ye come doon a minute, Kirsty?" said Francis.

"I'll be wi' ye in less time," she replied; and he had hardly more than dismounted, when she was by his side.

He told her what had passed between him and his mother since she left them.

"It's a rael bonny nicht!" said Kirsty, "and we'll jist tak oor time to turn the thing ower—that is, gien ye bena tired, Francie. Come, we'll put the beastie up first."

She led the horse into the dark stable, took his bridle off, put a halter on him, slackened his girths, and gave him a feed of corn—all in the dark; which things done, she and her lover set out for the Horn.

The whole night seemed thinking of the day that was gone. All doing seemed at an end, yea God himself to be resting and thinking. The peace of it sank into their bosoms, and filled them so, that they

walked a long way without speaking. There was no wind, and no light but the starlight. The air was like the clear dark inside some diamonds. The only sound that broke the stillness was the voice of Kirsty, sweet and low—and it was as if the dim starry vault thought, rather than she uttered, the words she quoted:—

> "Summer Night, come from God,
> On your beauty, I see,
> A still wave has flowed
> Of Eternity."

At a certain spot on the ridge of the Horn, Francis stopped.

"This is whaur ye left me this time last year, Kirsty," he said; "—left me wi' my Maker to mak a man o' me. It was 'maist makin me ower again!"

There was a low stone just visible among the heather; Kirsty seated herself upon it. Francis threw himself among the heather, and lay looking up in her face.

"That mother o' yours is 'maist ower muckle for ye, Francie!" said Kirsty.

"It's no aften, Kirsty, ye tell me what I ken as weel's yersel!" returned Francis.

"Weel, Francie, ye maun tell *me* something the night!—Gien it wudna mismuve ye, I wad fain ken hoo ye wan throu that day we pairtit here."

Without a moment's hesitation, Francis began the tale—giving her to know, however, that in what took place there was much he did not understand so as to tell it again.

When he made an end, Kirsty rose and said,

"Wad ye please to sit upo' that stane, Francie!"

In pure obedience he rose from the heather, and sat upon the stone.

She went behind him, and clasped his head, round the temples, with her shapely, strong, faithful hands.

"I ken ye noo for a man, Francis. Ye hae set yersel to du *his* wull, and no yer ain: ye're a king; and for want o' a better croon, I croon ye wi my twa han's."

Little thought Kirsty how near she came, in word and deed, to the crowning of Dante by Virgil, as recorded toward the close of the "Purgatorio."

Then she came round in front of him, he sitting bewildered and taking no part in the solemn ceremony save that of submission, and knelt slowly down before him, laying her head on his knees, and saying,—

"And here's yer kingdom, Francis—my heid and my hert! Du wi' me what ye wull."

"Come hame wi' me, and help save my mother," he answered, in a voice choked with emotion.

"I wull," she said, and would have risen; but he laid his hands on her head, and thus they remained for a time in silence. Then they rose, and went.

They had gone about half-way to the farm before either spoke. Then Kirsty said,—

"Francie, there's ae thing I maun beg o' ye, and but ane—'at ye winna desire me to tak the heid o' yer table. I canna but think it an ungracious thing 'at a young wuman like me, the son's wife, suld put the man's ain mother, his father's wife, oot o' the place whaur his father set her. I'm layin doon no prenciple; I'm sayin only hoo it affecs me. I want to come hame as her dochter, no as mistress o' the hoose in her stead. And ye see, Francie, that'll gie

ye anither haud o' her, agen disgracin o' hersel! Promise me, Francie, and I'll sune tak the maist pairt o' the trouble o' her aff o' yer han's."

"Ye're aye richt, Kirsty!" answered Francis. "As ye wull."

CHAPTER XLIV

KIRSTY'S TOCHER

THE next morning, Kirsty told her parents that she was going to marry Francie.

"Ye du richt, my bairn," said her father. "He's come in sicht o' 's high callin, and it's no possible for ye langer to refuse him."

"But, eh! what am I to du wantin ye, Kirsty?" moaned her mother.

"Ye min', mother," answered Kirsty, "hoo I wad be oot the lang day wi Steenie, and ye never thoucht ye hadna me!"

"Na, never. I aye kenned I had the twa o' ye."

"Weel, it's no a God's-innocent but a deil's-gowk I'll hae to luik efter noo, and I maun come hame ilka possible chance to get hertenin frae you and my father, or I winna be able to bide it. Eh, mother, efter Steenie, it'll be awfu' to spen' the day wi *her!* It's no 'at ever she'll be fou: I s' see to that!—it's 'at she'll aye be toom!—aye ringin wi toomness!"

Here Kirsty turned to her father, and said,—

"Wull ye gie me a tocher, father?"

"Ay wull I, lassie,—what ye like, sae far as I hae't to gie."

"I want Donal—that's a'. Ye see I maun ride a heap wi the puir thing, and I wud fain hae something

aneth me 'at ye gae me! The cratur 'll aye hing to the Knowe, and, whan I gie his wull he'll fess me hame o' himsel.—I wud hae likit things to bide as they are, but she wud hae worn puir Francie to the verra deid!"

CHAPTER XLV

KIRSTY'S SONG

MRS. GORDON manages the house and her reward is to sit at the head of the table. But she pays Kirsty infinitely more for the privilege than any but Kirsty can know, in the form of leisure for things she likes far better than housekeeping—among the rest, for the discovery of such songs as this, the last of hers I have seen:—

LOVE IS HOME.

Love is the part, and love is the whole;
  Love is the robe, and love is the pall;
Ruler of heart and brain and soul,
  Love is the lord and the slave of all!
I thank thee, Love, that thou lov'st me;
I thank thee more that I love thee.

Love is the rain, and love is the air;
  Love is the earth that holdeth fast;
Love is the root that is buried there,
  Love is the open flower at last!
I thank thee, Love all round about,
That the eyes of my love are looking out.

Love is the sun and love is the sea;
  Love is the tide that comes and goes;
Flowing and flowing it comes to me;
  Ebbing and ebbing to thee it flows!
Oh my sun, and my wind, and tide!
My sea, and my shore, and all beside!

Light, oh light that art by showing ;
  Wind, oh wind that liv'st by motion ;
Thought, oh thought that art by knowing ;
  Will, that art born in self-devotion !
Love is you, though not all of you know it ;
Ye are not love, yet ye always show it!

Faithful creator, heart-longed-for father,
  Home of our heart-infolded brother,
Home to thee all thy glories gather—
  All are thy love, and there is no other !
O Love-at-rest ; we loves that roam—
Home unto thee, we are coming home !

THE END.

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